University of Alberta

Mothers' Experiences of their Relationships with Adolescent Daughters

by

Rita Irene Knodel

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STEPPING BEYOND ME

Generations stepping beyond me
over the light over the sill
from which I step,
no, not time not anything
can trace these footsteps as their own
generations stepping beyond me
carve your own pathways in stone.

Jade O'Riley
Aug.14.93

Abstract

Many historical and cultural changes have affected women's lives and the experiences of mothering in North American culture over the past century. From one generation to the next, women's lives have changed significantly. Yet, psychological literature on mother-daughter relationships has paid little attention to this sociohistorical context. Instead, theories and common assumptions about these relationships and specifically about mothering are removed form mother's own experiences. The current ideology of "good" mothering has been a collection of prescriptions that have not considered the contexts, realities and limitations of women's lives. The relationship between mothers and daughters has generally been seen to be intense, emotionally charged and conflicted, particularly during the daughter's adolescence. Many of these assumptions are based on traditional theories of adolescence that emphasize the difficulty girls have in separating from their mothers at this time. This study questions the theories and constructs that underlie much of our current psychological understanding of the mother-daughter relationship and returns to explore women's own experiences of mothering adolescent daughters in today's culture.

Given that motherhood is a cultural construction, it is not possible to understand a woman's experience devoid of history, context, and interpretation. Attention to how a woman's story was elicited, to what was shared during the research conversation, and to how it was understood in the process of a research context were requirements in this

study. A feminist, narrative inquiry evolved as the chosen methodology to meet these requirements.

Each of the five mothers who participated in the study gave rich and descriptive accounts of their experiences of having mothered adolescent daughters. For the mothers in this study, the historical context and their own mothers' histories and experiences were significant in establishing important narrative themes in their lives. Often, the woman identified the theme topic from the past, then talked about a very conscious attempt in the present to convey this differently to her own daughter. Clearly, the mothers worked at giving their daughters the best tools for living, given their perspective at the time. This is a positive result that should be recognized and honored. This feminist, narrative inquiry begins to examine women's experiences of mothering adolescent daughters in a contextually sensitive way. Conclusions and implications for research, for counselling, and for the mother-daughter relationship, itself, are drawn.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The psychological interpretations of the mother-daughter relationship have had a profound impact on how we view, understand, and even experience this relationship (Apter, 1990; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993; Nice, 1992). The subject of mothers and daughters is of interest to many women. However, theories of mother-daughter interaction often do not fit with the experience women have in their own mother-daughter relationships (Heilbrun, 1989; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). This is particularly true of the mother and adolescent daughter experience over which much controversy has arisen (Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1987; Rich, 1990).

Overview

To provide background for this study, I will outline some of the historical and cultural changes that have affected the experience of mothering in North American culture over the past century. Then I will narrow the focus from mothering in general to mothering daughters specifically. The literature on adolescent development is cited to situate studies of mother-adolescent daughter relationships. Following this, I will review some of the common underlying assumptions made about this relationship. Many of these assumptions derive from psychological theories that are historically relative and

may not be appropriate for current use (Heilbrun, 1989; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991).

Mothering in a Changing Culture

Cultural and societal influences have significantly changed the life-worlds[1] of North American mothers from one generation to the next (Glick, 1977; Payne, 1983). Payne notes that:

> For much of recorded history, it has not been easy to imagine many different possibilities for women's lives; indeed in most cultures, for innumerable generations, daughters have grown up to lead lives very similar to their mothers'. However, the recurring patterns of women's lives from generation to generation have been interrupted signally at various points in history by major political and technological changes: the industrial revolution, the hard-won advances in educational and professional opportunities for women, improvements in methods of contraception and the numerous periods of struggle for women's rights have had an irrevocable impact. (p. xiv)

Hochschild (1989) describes how, initially, women's lives changed less than men's lives during the early industrialization of American cities. Generally speaking, men moved

---

[1] Life-world is defined by Giorgi (1975) as the everyday world as it is lived prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind.

away from farm life to take employment in factories. Their work environments changed. Money became the exchange currency. Instead of a former closely knit family and kinship network, they associated, as a result of industrialization, with a more varied group of peers.

Meanwhile, most married women maintained a primary identity in the home as wives and mothers. Without effective contraception, becoming a mother was almost a given. In the 1800s, women in North America gave birth to approximately eight children and raised the five or six who survived to adulthood (Hochschild, 1989). Although women felt the industrial and cultural changes, it was not until the 20th century that women took their places in the industrialized economy in the way men had in the 19th century. "If earlier it was men who changed the social patterns of their fathers faster than women changed those of their mothers, today it is women who are changing these faster" (Hochschild, p. 242).

Smith-Rosenberg's (1975) account of women's relationships in the 19th century also discusses these changes. She maintains that women's relationships with other women were a primary part of their social structure. How these relationship bonds changed during the course of history and what effects these changes had on women's lives are also outlined.

In the 19th century, the social world of women was grounded in female kinship. At the foundation was an intimate mother-daughter bond that modeled the positive

strength, support, and intimacy of female relationships. Smith-Rosenberg (1982) suggests that female bonds were accepted and valued from an early age, which fostered identity-formation and healthy self-esteem. She argues that mother-daughter conflict and opposition were much less evident in the 19th century than they are today.

With the modernization that took place in the 20th century came an emphasis on the nuclear family, the separation of "home" and "work" places, and subsequently of men's and women's worlds. The devaluation of women, of their roles and relationships, resulted as women became isolated from one another. Conflict between generations of women also became more evident (Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). The "generation gap" became known as the lack of understanding between generations due to the difference in life-worlds of parent and child, mother and daughter.

Adolescence

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. In North American culture, the change from child to adult status occurs gradually and over an extended period, often ten or more years. Theoretical models of adolescent development appear to reflect diverse views. The psychoanalytic theorists (Blos, 1967; Freud, 1958) describe a period of "normal adolescent turmoil." They emphasize the normalcy and even necessity of a period of social rebellion and increased conflict with parents as part of healthy adolescent development. This view of adolescent separation-individuation focuses on the

adolescent-parent tie as an infantile love-object, which the adolescent must reject and disengage from in order to attain maturity or an individuated status (Blos, 1967).

Data from other empirical studies of normal adolescents (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Laursen & Collins, 1994; Offer & Offer, 1975) offer a different perspective. These researchers indicate that the majority of the subjects in their samples appeared to traverse the adolescent years calmly, accomplishing the transition to adulthood in a seemingly methodical, constructive manner, maintaining close and supportive family influences throughout the adolescent period.

Theorists and researchers who have attempted to describe the adolescent/parental separation-individuation process in greater detail have generally equated or compared it with the stages of separation-individuation that Mahler (1968) observed in infant development (Blos, 1967). Because Mahler's depictions of such infants' activities as "practicing" (i.e., wider exploration of the world with intermittent returns to the security of the mother or home-base) or "rapprochement" (i.e., alternating or conflicting desires to cling to or push away from parental attachment with resultant indecision, frustration, and temper tantrums) are markedly similar to prevalent adolescent behaviors, it appeared reasonable to assume that a similar process occurred during adolescence.

Unfortunately, the adoption of Mahler's separation-individuation construct ignored the need to actually observe or investigate adolescent-parent interactions to determine the unique content and sequence of issues and behaviors at this later stage of

development. Yet this idea of separation-individuation as an essential part of normal development has gone beyond Mahler's research with infants and is now grounded in most adolescent developmental theories.

Many of the theories and research studies regarding adolescent development exhibit major limitations which affect their generalizability to normal adolescent-parent relationships because the preponderance of data are drawn from psychoanalytic case studies. Where the data have been drawn from normal populations (i.e., Kohlberg), they are typically based on male samples and the results then extrapolated to include females. Also, the widespread use of structured, quantitative research instruments such as questionnaires, rating scales, and inventories may have further limited the scope of previous investigations. Their formulation from a specific theoretical base predetermined the constructs and variables to be examined, thereby possibly resulting in the omission or distortion of important issues, perceptions, or effects.

Mother-Daughter Relationships

The importance of the relationship between mothers and daughters was largely identified in the 1970s by feminist writers (Arcana, 1979; Caplan, 1981; Chodorow, 1978; Miller, 1976; Rich, 1976) who recognized the notable absence of the subject in the historical, anthropological, and psychological literature. By identifying problems inherent to the "institution of motherhood" in patriarchal society, these authors recognised potential difficulties in women's relationships with other women and between mothers

and their daughters (Caplan, 1981; Miller, 1976). Since then, writings on the mother-daughter relationship have flourished. The psychoanalytic contribution on this subject, in particular, has had a significant influence on how we view, understand and even experience this relationship (Apter, 1990; Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993; Nice, 1992).

Prevalent Assumptions of Mother-Daughter Relationships

The mother-daughter relationship has been described in the literature as "intense," "emotionally-charged," and "conflicted" (Friday, 1987) and more "ambivalent and ambiguous" than any of the other three parent-child dyads (Smith & Forehand, 1986; Troll, 1987). The adolescent stage is recognized as "the most difficult developmental period for the mother-daughter dyad" (Apter, 1990; Bassoff, 1987; Troll, 1987). These observations are based on the theoretical premise that during adolescence girls have more difficulty than boys in separating from their mothers (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1958) and that separation is the essential developmental task.

On the other hand, feminist developmental theorists (Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1991) have since described the importance of continued relationships for girls and women throughout the female life cycle. Studies have begun to examine how adolescent girls experience and conceptualize conflicting pressures to separate versus stay in connection (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990). Mothers' accounts and experiences, however, have not been explored in a similar, contextually sensitive way.

Some of the prevalent ideas (based on theoretical assertions) held about mothers and their adolescent daughters have had a significant impact on both girls and women (Walters, 1990). These include:

a) too much closeness between mothers and daughters is unhealthy beyond a certain age (Blos, 1967; Freud, 1958) and it signals immaturity in the daughter and "clinging," "overprotectiveness," or "living through" on the part of the mother (Bassoff, 1987; Chernin, 1986; Horney, 1945);

b) conflict between mothers and adolescent daughters is inevitable and essential to the full development of the daughter into an adult (Blos, 1962; Flax, 1978; Freud, 1958);

c) separation from the mother both literally and developmentally is the hallmark of mature individuation (Blos, 1962; Erikson, 1968); and

d) the attitude and emotional reaction of the mother during her daughter's adolescence (i.e., experiencing competition, envy, or jealousy) can impede her daughter's development (Friedman, 1980; La Sorsa & Fodor, 1990; Trad, 1995), female identity, body image, self-esteem (Chernin, 1985; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983), and healthy relationship formation (Bassoff, 1988).

Psychological theories that discuss mother-daughter interactions evolve out of psychoanalytic and early developmental perspectives that are mostly male based and have been generalized to female experience. These views do not address the sociocultural changes and generational shifts that women have experienced. Further study needs to be

done in this area. The presumption that mother-daughter relationships fit a basic blueprint that repeats for the following generation is an ahistorical approach. Perhaps conflict, if it is in fact an inherent element of this relationship, has to do with the lack of understanding and the difference in life-worlds between the separate generations of a mother and her daughter in our society.

The sociocultural contexts in which mothers and daughters live may, in fact, be essential to any description of female adolescent development and to the process of interaction between a mother and her daughter during this time period. As a result current fast-changing social and domestic patterns between generations of North American women are significant. Whereas men broke from the social patterns of their fathers due largely to industrialization during the late 19th and early 20th century, corresponding changes have taken place much more recently for women (Hochschild, 1989). The legalization of contraception, in Canada, in 1969 is one example of an important current development that has markedly changed women's lives as well as their experience of mothering. Unlike earlier generations of women, it is no longer a given that every woman will be a mother; women can now choose to remain childless. When women do decide to mother, the number and spacing of pregnancies is much more within their control.

The predominant psychoanalytic and developmental theories that focus on adolescence do not take sociocultural perspectives into consideration. Some of these theories do not even separate on the basis of gender; discussing interaction in the more

general terms of "parent" and "adolescent" without specification of whether the parent is a mother or a father, or the adolescent, a son or a daughter. As a result, these theories do not adequately reflect female experiences.

Underlying assumptions of adolescent development that have dominated the psychological literature stress the importance of individualistic self-definition, autonomy, self-reliance, independence, and self-actualization as part of the development of a healthy, mature self. More recently, feminist theorists (Gilligan, 1982; Surrey, 1991) have questioned the validity of these constructs as applied to girls and women.

In addition to the experience of women not being adequately represented in these mainstream psychological theories, what studies we do have of mother-daughter relationships frequently focus on the daughters' perspectives alone. Often they address daughters' attempts to grow up and find their own individual identities separate from their mothers (Gilligan, 1982; Surrey, 1991). Although the mother-daughter relationship changes during adolescence from an adult-child to an adult-adult relationship, few studies have considered how mothers experience this transformation. I maintain that the perspectives from which mother-daughter relationships have been studied may be inherently problematic and thus, may limit the depth of our knowledge on the subject particularly as it relates to the mothers' experiences.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Overview

A critical examination of some of the foundational theories related to mothering daughters is presented next in order to provide background about the current knowledge on this subject. It includes a historical review of the assumptions underlying relevant psychological theories.

Psychology's Perspective on Mothering

Underlying World Views

Recognizing that metaphors guide perceptions and thinking, Pepper (1942) provided a conceptual schema for understanding the predominant scientific world views of our time. Four of the root metaphors identified by him are useful for evaluating the underpinnings of our current psychological theories. They include: formism, mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. A fifth root metaphor—the narrative—was introduced by Sarbin in 1986. It will also be reviewed for use in this study.

Formism allows for the organizing and classifying of objects on the basis of their perceived forms. Classification systems such as the nomenclature used in botany (e.g., species, genus) exemplify this metaphor. Psychological theories which evolved out of formism include the early personality trait theories that classified and compared people

according to personality traits, such as intelligence, aggression, anxiety, shyness, and others. Psychiatric diagnostic categories as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) also derive from formism. A central criticism of this world view is that it limits the description of a person to trait categories. No information of the person's history or the personal meaning of the trait is seen as important.

Mechanism takes the machine as its root metaphor. The mechanistic world view likens humans to machines and depicts them as passive organisms that react to environmental stimulation. This model of development characteristically sees development as a continuous process that occurs due primarily to external factors. Behaviorism and social learning theories of development exemplify this world view. Science in the mechanistic sense aims at confirming universal laws that guide the functioning of the behaving organism as a self-maintaining machine.

Organicism sees people as parts of an organized whole with an inherent organized process of development. Human beings are seen as spontaneously active organisms capable of engaging in self-directed behavior. Development is viewed as a discontinuous process that reflects qualitative changes in behavior. Change is teleological in nature, following a goal-oriented sequence. The organismic view has been the most influential metaphor for developmental psychology, where a predictable sequence of developmental stages or tasks are emphasized (Dixon, 1986; Sarbin, 1986). Theorists whose work

reflects the organismic view include Erikson, Havinghurst, Levinson, Piaget, and Kohlberg.

Many of these latter theorists have significantly influenced our thinking on the relationship between mothers and daughters even though their research was usually done with men and the results generalized to women. More recent research findings of girls' and women's developmental experience (Gilligan, 1982; Surrey, 1991) indicate there are significant differences between the genders. A criticism of organismic theories is that they typically presume the existence of a fixed sequence of developmental stages or tasks, with one stage leading invariably to another in the same order and in the same way for all (Dixon, 1986; Gilligan, 1982).

Contextualism, the fourth world view, embodies the concept of reality as an open, dynamic and teleological process of understanding. The central element is the historical event, which can only be understood when it is located in the context of time and space. Contextualism emphasizes the notion that human behavior is situated within a sociohistorical and cultural context of meanings and relationships. Change and development are intrinsic to contextualism. This view opposes the orderliness and stability which are implied by both the mechanistic and organismic world views. The scientific method in this tradition does not attempt to "uncover" the stable, inherent structure in the organization of things. Instead, it is viewed as an active, productive, or constructive process of inquiry (McGuire, 1983). Both the product of the process as well

as the process itself reflect the contextual boundaries in which they operate or develop. The scientist is seen to be fully immersed and active in the context and is affected by both the concrete applications and consequences of the research findings. Above all, knowledge is seen to be conceptual and conjectural; no single method can demonstrate the "truth." Contextualism has tended to be overlooked in the development of theories in the past, yet is now being recognized as a more appropriate view for understanding human behavior than formism, mechanism, and organicism. Given the importance of the historical event in the context of time, space, and culture, contextualism provides a broader scope for the study of behavior within relationships. The unique experience of a mother, for example, can be understood in relation to her particular context. Social constructionist (Gergen, 1973) and constructivist (Watzlawick, 1984) theories exemplify this world view. Proponents also argue that context is an essential element neglected in traditional developmental literature.

Lastly, the narrative root metaphor was introduced by Sarbin (1986) as a complement to contextualism. He saw these two metaphors as "cut from the same cloth" (p. x). Where contextualism is the historical act, the narrative is the cognitive structuring and the storying of events and human actions that have a temporal dimension. He proposed that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures. It is because we understand our own lives in terms of narrative structures that we can understand the action of others. Stories are lived before they are

told. Where there are no firm connections between events, a person organizes them into an imaginative sequence that holds together.

In summary, the root metaphors that reflect the earlier predominant scientific world views are formism, mechanism, and organicism. Formism classifies objects by general traits, types, or characteristics in an ahistorical manner. Mechanism places events in antecedent-consequent relationships, where the antecedent is the cause. Organicism presupposes a predictable sequence of developmental stages or tasks. The root metaphors that have dominated psychological theory are mechanicism and organicism.

Contextualism and the narrative are root metaphors that have been identified more recently as more appropriate for studying human conduct. Contextualism is sensitive to the particulars of time and space and highlights an event or experience in the context of other events. Narrative root metaphor is the storied form of discourse that uses language to express the relationship between and among events as contributing to a result.

Many scholars have emphasized the importance of a using a model that will adequately capture the complexity of women's life circumstances (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Carlsen, 1989; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991). With this in mind, I have chosen contextualism and narrative as root metaphors to guide the explorations in this study.

Historical Review

At the turn of the century, psychology began to be recognized as a science. Polkinghorne (1994) notes that, though the study of psychology in Europe and America had been developing from a broad base, this was narrowed significantly in America in the early 20th century. American psychologists gave up the study of consciousness and other social phenomena that were not directly observable in the behavior of an individual. This was in accordance with the criteria for a true natural science of the time (Morawski, 1986).

The mechanistic view described above affirmed the natural science paradigm which aimed at prediction, control, and measurement. Positivism (the philosophy based solely on observable scientific facts and their relation to each other) and the objective experimental method were thought to be the only appropriate means for the study of human behavior.

Psychologists became "authorities" on human behavior and their scientific research guided and instructed parents on appropriate parenting behaviors. Behaviorism and social learning theories, both mechanistic in origin, sought to explain all human behavior as a response to environmental stimulation. Children could be shaped using principles of reinforcement and parents had control over, and were responsible for, the outcome—raising their children to become responsible adults. Mothers, in particular,

were viewed as technical experts whose marketable product was an adjusted and achieving child (Ehrenreich & English, 1978).

The psychoanalytic theories, also primarily mechanistic in nature, held considerable authority even though they did not lend themselves to the testing or operationalization required by the newly accepted scientific method of early 20th century America (Polkinghorne, 1988). Nonetheless, Freud's basic assertion of the primacy of the early mother-child bond was an accepted foundational theory from which many new mainstream developmental theories emerged.

The developmental theories reflected organicism. Theorists typically presumed the existence of a fixed sequence of developmental stages or tasks, with one stage leading invariably to the next. Psychological research, which had emphasized parental influence and the importance of the role women played as mothers in the home, began to examine the effects mothers had on the development of their children, by varying factors within the control of the experimental setting. Bowlby's (1952) theory of maternal deprivation, for example, including the concepts of bonding, separation, and symbiosis, reflected organicism. Bowlby drew on Harlow's work with monkeys to demonstrate that the infant's earliest ties to its mother had to do with more than just the provision of food from her (Birns, 1985). He compiled an extensive list of studies that demonstrated the negative impact on the child of separation from the mother.

Bowlby extended the "critical period" that Freud had identified beyond infancy into the second year, and described the role of the mother as the primary source of emotional sustenance. His work provided the theoretical basis for a vast amount of research on attachment behavior (Birns, 1985). The implicit assumption of this literature is that the nature of the child's tie to the mother in the earliest years will predict later behavior and development, and that by measuring attachment behavior we can predict the future. It is important to note that Bowlby's ideas were later expanded into the theory of separation-individuation in infants (Mahler, 1968), which was subsequently applied to adolescent development by Blos (1967).

Neo-Freudians such as Horney (1945) and Sullivan (1953) also theorized about the importance of the early interpersonal relationship, particularly between mother and infant. Horney proposed that certain parental behaviors, such as indifference, overprotection, or rejection could cause a child to experience anxiety and helplessness which would manifest in aggression, withdrawal, or overly compliant behavior. Horney also speculated on the importance of the mother's reaction to other events, such as her adolescent's separation process.

Sullivan (1953), also an organicist, saw personality development as a series of predetermined stages, but he believed they were characterized by interpersonal factors, not instinctual ones. These stages involved the cognitive processing of events in the primary relationship.

Mahler's (1968) expansion of Bowlby's (1952) ideas into the theory of separation-individuation in infant development was widely accepted. Although Mahler did not apply the separation-individuation theory to adolescence, various other theorists did. Blos (1967) saw intergenerational conflict between adolescents and their parents as not only normal, but even essential to the successful completion of the individuation process. This predominant psychoanalytic view informed mothers of what to expect and how to understand adolescence described as a period of normal turmoil and rebellion.

Erikson (1968) added a psychosocial outlook to the psychoanalytic view. He defined eight developmental life stages from infancy through later adulthood, each stage delineated by a specific psychological task which must be successfully resolved for effective adaptation in subsequent life stages. According to Erikson, the task at adolescence is ego identity. Turmoil and rebellion at this stage are seen to be the hallmark of adolescence, necessary for successful separation from the family, particularly from the mother (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1958).

Critique of Science and Psychology

Criticism of the natural science method and some of its claims have surfaced from time to time from within the field of psychology and from outside (Polkinghorne, 1994). The natural science method, which the leading theorists to date (e.g., Freud, Erikson, Bowlby) had supported, was questioned on its three major tenets: its claim to be objective, to be value free, and to be universal. The criticism of the natural science method

has gradually led to the demand for a more pluralistic, relativistic, and interpretive orientation, one that is consistent with a more contextual world view (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1986).

Gergen (1973) rejects the notion of objectivity in the study of psychology. He argues that human behavior cannot be studied in a laboratory using a mechanistic metaphor. Instead he maintains that human behavior is dependent on internal, symbolic processes which are beyond the scope of the natural science method. He advances a convincing argument that theories of social behavior are primary reflections of contemporary history.

Morawski (1986) also discusses some of the limits of natural science by addressing the mechanistic and reductionistic aspects of the natural science method. She supports Gergen's argument that the scientific method is not value-free and that it reflects society's acceptance of the values of autonomy and individuality. "The positivist mechanics of individual psychology fitted well with the then-current models of social reform and control" (p. 52). This "control" was necessary in light of "the resolute belief in the irrational, amoral bases of social action" where "[h]aphazard impulses, primitive drives, irrational motives, blind desires, instinctual compulsions, and immoral urges were the stuff of social action" (p. 52). She notes that it was this "control" that was to be a public responsibility of psychologists just as it was the private responsibility of the parent.

Another major criticism of the natural science paradigm is its assertion that universal patterns of psychological development fit everyone, men and women alike. It does not consider variations based on the influences of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or historical location.

Feminist Critique

Feminist reaction to the scientific method and some of its claims in psychological theory has come from experts in multiple disciplines: historians, literary critics, writers, psychologists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists. Many have questioned the underlying motive of the scientific method, which seems to promote only the values of those who support it. The mechanistic and organismic orientations that guided scientists' interpretation of human behavior seemed reductionistic and sometimes self-serving.

Feminist historians, for example, recognized the social control wielded by psychologists and researchers during the post-war period from 1945 to 1960. This was seen as a period of retrogression for North American women, a period in which many of the gains and freedoms experienced during the war years were taken back as women were urged to return to the home (Bernard, 1974; Gluck, 1987). The maternal deprivation studies conducted by Bowlby (1952) lent "scientific" support to the argument that women, particularly mothers, needed to stay in the home. The media (e.g., early 1950s television programming and advertising) had far-reaching influence in conveying this stereotype of the ideal mother to women across North America.

The powerful ideology of motherhood focused on the importance of the relationship between mother and baby, the need for mothers to stay at home, and the dangers of "maternal deprivation" if they did not. Motherhood was glorified and mothers were given an overwhelming responsibility and "duty" to bear and rear healthy children (Penfold & Walker, 1983). At the same time, there were not many culturally sanctioned choices for women other than motherhood. As a result, the situation of involuntarily childless women in the 1940s and 1950s was "an especially painful and stigmatizing experience" (Sandelowski, 1990, p. 55), given the intense pronatalist views of that period, especially because of the inextricable link between gynecology and female psychology drawn from Freudian interpretations of the unconscious processes in involuntary childlessness.

The 1960s feminist movement began to question women's roles within North American culture. Friedan's The Feminine Mystique criticized domestic ideology. She saw the stereotype of the ideal mother as both illusion and entrapment. The criticisms of the "institution of motherhood" (Friedan, 1963; Rich, 1976) led to increased attention to women's experiences and relationships in a patriarchal society.

Mothers who accepted the "scientific mothering" formulations no longer relied on the advice and experience of their own mothers. As experts—physicians and psychologists—recommended new child-rearing practices, women were eager to follow their prescriptions, even though these recommendations were sometimes contradictory

to the ones held by their mothers. Thurer (1994) discusses the heightened level of confusion and self-consciousness among mothers, in the 1950s and 1960s, who responded to the dramatically changing trends in parenting.

> And the new rules of conduct for child rearing turned 180 degrees away from earlier prescriptions. The astringent, scientific techniques of the decade before World War II were abruptly jettisoned in favor of cuddly, twenty-four-hour "permissiveness." The change happened so fast, according to social critics, that it could make a mother's head spin. Many women in the late forties and early fifties found themselves changing their methods in the middle of their child-raising careers. One mother described her startling recognition, one evening at dinnertime, of the change in her ideas: "I was serving a new vegetable to the boys. Suddenly I realized that I expected Peter, the oldest, to clean his plate. Daniel, the middle one, didn't have to eat it but he had to taste it. And little Billy, as far as I was concerned, could do whatever he wanted." (p. 247-248)

Feminist writers (Arcana, 1979; Miller, 1976; Rich, 1976) addressed the "mother blame" prevalent in mainstream psychological ideologies. While on the one hand, mothers were being idealized, on the other, they were being blamed.

> The mother's primary responsibility for the child's adjustment appeared repeatedly in theories about families and children. For instance, the "bad mother" has a pervasive role in the literature about childhood asthma. Mothers of

> asthmatic children have been accused of unconscious hostility and accompanying rejection or over-protection. . . . Delinquency was often attributed to defects in the mother-child relationship. The lack of a meaningful primary relationship with the mother was felt to be a precursor of psychopathic development. . . . Many theories about schizophrenia assigned culpability to the mother . . . [and] parents of autistic children, particularly mothers, were viewed as causing their child's terrible affliction. (Penfold & Walker, 1983, pp. 129-130)

Single mothers were also considered inherently "risky" for fostering healthy child development (Febbraro, 1994; Penfold & Walker, 1983). Given that the societal prescriptions considered two-parent family systems the ideal, any departure from this form was seen as unacceptable. The indictment of single mothers in the psychological literature has remained widespread and pervasive.

Feminist Psychoanalytic Perspectives

In the 1970s feminist scholarship began to address the mother-daughter relationship, primarily from a psychoanalytic perspective. Recognizing that in patriarchal societies, mothering functions are valued differently depending on whether the child is male or female, theorists began to focus on these different mothering functions.

Chodorow's (1978) theory, based on Klein's object-relations theory, brought the mother forward in an active position as the first primary object of the child. She asserted that the experience of mothering has different psychological consequences for boys and

for girls. For both boys and girls the first object choice is the mother. For boys to differentiate they must assume a gender identity that is different from their mothers, whereas for girls, the process of individuation is built on a primary sense of unity and continuity with the mother. In Chodorow's view, the results of this differential process of psychological development for girls is that they are more relational with less firm ego boundaries. Women, therefore, tend to have problems with autonomy and differentiation.

Gilligan's (1982) research investigating women's moral development complemented Chodorow's work. Gilligan's findings suggested that women find safety in relationships and fear losing connectedness. She suggested that, although this is in part due to socialization, women's early developmental experiences set the foundation for such differences.

Feminist object-relation theorists (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Flax, 1978; Friedman, 1980), also relying on Chodorow's basic theory, saw interpersonal conflict between mother and daughter as directly related to the difficult role mothers have in patriarchal culture. Flax maintained that since adolescence marks the height of intense socialization, when conformity is demanded in young women, and because it is the mother's task to socialize her daughter, conflict is inevitable.

The idea that girls and women do not want to be like their mothers carries forward from this point. Basically by finding fault with her mother's mothering an adolescent girl begins the separation process. Recognizing that her mother is imperfect allows a

daughter to separate from her in order to develop her own sense of self. Jean Baker Miller (1976) addresses this issue from another perspective. She believes that because women are in a subordinate position to males in our culture, daughters grow up seeing that their mothers lack power and that their knowledge and skills are devalued. The difficulties of then identifying with the mother are obvious.

Friedman (1980) argued that in our culture, given the changing roles of women, mothers have even more difficulty reacting appropriately to their daughters' separation attempts. When mothers feel abandoned or react possessively or with jealousy, daughters have difficulty in breaking away. Chernin (1986) has written extensively on how she believes this pressure on the daughter manifests in women's emotional and psychological problems related to eating disorders.

Bassoff (1987) describes how mothers struggle, change, and grow during their daughters' adolescence. She sees mothers of adolescent daughters struggling with perceived rejections, sexuality issues, and changing expectations in much the same way as their adolescent daughters. She contends that both face similar developmental tasks of separation and autonomy.

La Sorsa and Fodor (1990) also look at developmental tasks and dyadic issues of adolescent daughters (aged 13 to 19 years) and their mid-life mothers (aged 35 to 55 years) from a psychodynamic perspective. They suggest that mothers and daughters are

experiencing a life-cycle crisis of separation and self-definition. Their study highlights the issues of rebellion and competition, which they see as significant and often overlooked.

Critique of the Psychoanalytic Study of Mothering

Birns (1985) maintains that the deterministic premise in psychoanalytic theory has held mothers responsible for negative consequences in their children's lives. "Mother-blame" is seen in much of the psychoanalytic literature (Caplan, 1989; Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1990). Surrey believes that professional psychological and clinical training establishes the "culturally-sanctioned thinking and use of 'blaming' formulations and diagnoses" (p. 84). In reviewing her own case notes, Surrey cites language she, herself, has used to describe mothers. The list includes: "engulfing," "controlling," "intrusive," "enmeshed," "seductive," "overprotective," "narcissistic," "critical," "cold," "unavailable," "unempathic," "distant," "depleted," "ineffective," and "depriving." Vocabulary commonly used in the psychoanalytic literature of parent-adolescent interaction also includes: "bonding," "fusion," "symbiosis," " enmeshment," "engulfment," "differentiation," "separation," "individuation," and "autonomy."

Walters (1990) notes that these words are inextricably linked to a problematic psychological framework. They have a history, and are gendered:

> For example, while the term "separation" has a general meaning in relation to processes of development, it also has a particular resonance when we think of the term "mother". . . . Separation from whom? we need to ask, and for what

> purpose? Not only do we need to question these concepts for their gender bias, but we need to locate them historically and culturally. For example, autonomy and individuation are highly valued characteristics of a capitalist society, and as such are naturalized so as to appear as unassailable truths about the nature of adulthood and maturity. Not coincidentally, these highly valued attributes of a functioning adult in a capitalist society are found to be lacking or deficient in women. (p. 9)

Critiquing the psychoanalytic approach to the study of mothering, Miller (1990) explains that it is important to remember that psychoanalytic formulations are not about observed behavior, but are, rather, explanations that organize clinical experience. Although they are compelling and are often taken as truth, they are conceptualizations. Usually multiple explanations exist for the same data. Further, these conceptualizations typically come from work with psychoanalysts' clinical patients. Extrapolating from this population in order to confirm universal laws of human behavior, an inherent goal of mechanistic science, is a questionable practice.

Although the feminist psychoanalytic view has acknowledged the mother-daughter relationship and increased its visibility in the literature, it still relies on a fundamental framework that is problematic. Rather than supporting mothers, the formulations seem to re-emphasize the responsibility and culpability. Sanford and Donovan (1984) describe the costs in self-esteem for mothers who believe the deterministic premises that have permeated society. Mothers are at risk for low self-

esteem and depression when their self-esteem is tied to a child's success or failure and because measurement of success or failure is so subjective, women can not win.

Self-in-Relation Theory

Self-in-relation theory (Surrey, 1991) derives from the psychodynamic school of psychology and also builds on Chodorow's (1978) theory of gender identity formation. Its proponents attempt to revalue the female process. Self-in-relation theory does not, however, emphasize a deficit in women's autonomy or ability to differentiate from their mothers. Instead, it emphasizes the enhanced ability most women have with relationship skills based on early identification with their mothers. It recognizes the importance of affiliation and relationship in psychological well-being, particularly for women. The special identification and early attachment between mother and daughter profoundly affect the way the self is defined in females as well as the development of their later interpersonal skills. Surrey asserts that for women, relational needs are primary throughout life. From a base of healthy, dynamic relationships, females are motivated to become confident, creative and fully functioning human beings. Contrary to former theories, aspects of self-development are seen to emerge only in the context of relationship. That is, growth actually occurs through connection and there is no inherent need to give up or sacrifice an important bond for psychological growth.

According to self-in-relation theory, the ability of a mother to listen, respond, and empathize with her child and her child's increasing capacity to reciprocate these behaviors

establishes the basis for emotional connection. This sense of connection, according to Surrey (1991), forms the necessary framework that precedes the processes of differentiation and clarification during adolescence. During adolescence this theory highlights the importance of maintaining connection while validating changes that are occurring. The mutuality of shared understanding that develops over time between mother and daughter is important and rewarding for both. Surrey believes that by valuing the relationship between them, both mother and daughter are empowered and feel increased self-esteem. When the relationship is valued throughout the changes of adolescence, the bond between them is strengthened. Surrey's theory is supported by and corresponds with the findings that show that many adult women re-establish close and intimate connections with their mothers after a period of transition (Bromberg, 1983; Fischer, 1986; Honess & Lintern, 1990).

More recent studies, using descriptive research methods and non-clinical research settings, are providing more support for the self-in-relation theory in the study of adolescent girls (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991). In describing their relationships with their mothers, adolescent girls have expressed strong connections (Rich, 1990). Instead of "separating" from them, the girls identified some changing dimensions of their relationships. Daughters became more distinctly aware of similarities to, and differences from, their mothers and they developed more realistic perceptions of their mothers and of their relationships with them. They accepted some

limitations set out by their mothers and challenged others. Importantly, they expressed the desire to identify with their mothers in more mutually affirming ways.

Stern (1990) also examined issues of separation and connection of mothers and daughters in interviews with adolescent girls. She found that the young women were concerned with both issues yet did not pose them in opposition to one another. The daughters saw that developing independence and relying less on their mothers for instrumental care would improve their relationships by freeing them to appreciate their mothers more fully.

Criticism of Self-in-Relation Theory

Unfortunately, self-in-relation theory again looks at the mother-daughter relationship from a deterministic perspective which has been problematic from the outset. Kaschak (1988), for example, is critical of Chodorow's (1978) basic theory, describing it as a "uni-dimensional analysis of a multi- and inter-dimensional problem" (p. 110). She maintains that any theoretical stance must acknowledge the complexity of the experience of each woman, along with the multiplicity of influences that determine her experience at any given time.

The deterministic assumption that events in the early years predetermine adult behavior and that mothers are the major determinants of development, prevalent in much of the psychoanalytic literature, is also challenged (Birns, 1985; Enns, 1991; Lerner, 1988). Enns sees the exclusive mother-daughter focus of the feminist object-relations

theorists (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Jordan & Surrey, 1986) as limiting. Although they have moved beyond the "mother-blaming" formulations by showing the impact of patriarchal culture, they still largely see the child as a product of the mother. However, factors other than just the mother (e.g., fathers, family interactions, the individual child's temperament, social class, and sociopolitical contexts) are also known to influence development. "Families are also affected by: the education system; stresses in the workplace; the legal structures of marriage, divorce, child custody, abortion and sexuality; models of behavior for women and men, parents and children; the advice of professionals, class inequalities, and the sexual asymmetry that is embedded in all areas of society" (Penfold & Walker, 1983, p. 139).

Some feminists (Lerner, 1988; Mednick, 1989; Tavris, 1992) have also challenged the feminist object-relations and self-in-relation positions about their artificial dichotomies and dualistic thinking (i.e., autonomy vs. relatedness) that they set up between men and women. Again, the fundamental error of viewing one model as true for all women in all situations is very limiting.

Above all, there has been a serious misrepresentation of women's experience over the years as a result of interpretations of primarily male data resulting in personality and developmental theories and then being applied to women. The practice of inserting new information into the existing faulty theory in order to account for female development

must be questioned, as the result is often a convoluted explanation with limited value (Eichler, 1983; Kuhn, 1970).

As I examine the history of our current understanding of mother-daughter relationships, I am aware that this understanding has evolved from an inherently problematic paradigm. The widespread acceptance of these problematic theories occurred at a time when the "evidence" that came from a mechanistic and organismic scientific model was not challenged. This has created a problem in the continued researching of this topic. Feminist critics have emphasized the need to situate theories in their historic and cultural frame of reference in order to understand and evaluate their appropriateness for use today (Roberts, 1981; Morawski, 1986).

Theory has, of course, involved mothers in the mother-daughter relationship, but mothers' voices have not been heard. The psychoanalytic, object-relations, and developmental theories have focused on the perspective of the child. Although they have helped to create the construct of the modern mother, they have also excluded her experience in their formulations (Nice, 1992; Thurer, 1994).

Adolescent girls are finally being listened to (Gilligan, Lyons, & Hanmer, 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman, 1991) and their accounts do not describe conflicted, competitive relationships with their mothers. Rather, they describe strong connections and more realistic perceptions of their mothers and of their relationships with them (Rich, 1990; Stern, 1990).

Given the very limited contribution from women themselves, about their experiences of mothering adolescent daughters, I believe that by focusing on the subject from the mother's perspective, we would begin to correct the distortions and to validate the experience of mothers. Recognizing the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship as it exists in a patriarchal society and taking into account the sociohistorical context of individual mother-daughter dyads seems essential to understanding mother-daughter dynamics. A contextual understanding, respectful of the original narratives of mothers, offers a new way to re-examine this topic that stands in contrast to the prevalent mechanistic and organismic metaphoric approaches.

Approach to Research

Due to the pervasiveness of "mother-blame" in the mental health field (Caplan, 1989; Miller, 1976; Surrey, 1990), my aim in this study was to use a new approach. First, I decided to talk with women who were mothers. I wanted to listen to them, to hear their perspectives of their experiences during the years when their daughters were adolescents. For me, an appropriate method required the sensitivity for: (a) respectfully listening to each woman's experiences; (b) providing enough time and space for women to speak openly, freely, and in depth about their lives and relationships; and (c) hearing full accounts of their stories, including descriptions, feelings, and memories of experiences from their particular perspectives.

Harding (1987) notes that "feminist" inquiry is one that serves the interests of women and focuses on women's experiences in present conditions. As a therapist with a special interest in counselling women, I am invested in promoting healthy relationships between women and I believe that the mother-daughter relationship is one which has implications for other relationships between women. I agree with Surrey (1990) that "(a)s clinicians we have special responsibility for studying and facilitating healthy relational processes, and for understanding the larger cultural and systemic factors influencing women's relationships" (p. 85). This resonates with my own concept of studying the subject of motherhood.

From my experience as a counsellor, as a mother, and as a daughter, I sense that something is missing in the theoretical literature on mothering and my hunch is that the missing pieces lie in women's accounts of their own experiences as mothers.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

Natural science or experimental methods that are congruent with the mechanistic and organismic root metaphors seek out lawful and determined relationships that can be manipulated, controlled, and measured. Methodological principles in these perspectives tend to pre-establish and delimit the content of psychological inquiry (Colaizzi, 1978). Human science approaches, on the other hand, look at questions of meaning, in an effort to understand the significance of experience. They integrate person, context, and experience in a way that is consistent with contextual and narrative root metaphors. Because so much of what is known about mothering adolescent daughters comes from a natural science perspective, the aim of this study was to use a human science approach, to return, as much as possible, to the lived experiences of women who have been mothers.

The main objectives in this study were: (a) to listen to women's descriptions and narratives of their experiences of mothering adolescent daughters in our culture; (b) to allow women to speak openly and freely about their individual experiences; (c) to understand each woman's narrative in the context of her unique history; (d) to draw themes out of the descriptions and stories of mothering adolescent daughters that the women identified; and (e) to relate these themes back to existing formulations in such a way as to deepen our qualitative understanding of what it means to mother an adolescent daughter in contemporary society.

Given that motherhood is a cultural construction, it is not possible to understand a woman's experience devoid of history, context, and interpretation. Attention to how a woman's story was elicited, to what was shared during the research conversation, and to how it was understood in the process of a research context were requirements in this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology, narrative inqiry, and feminist research principles were considered for dealing with these methodological concerns.

The Evolution of the Methodology

Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

I began this study looking for human science methods that could give deeper understanding to the complex experience of mothering adolescent daughters. Phenomenology is a descriptive human science method that can explore and elucidate lived experience. It offers deep and meaningful understanding of human experience and honors the centrality of an individual's experience. In fact, it is the individual's experience, rather than their theoretical knowledge about the subject of inquiry, that is taken as the key source of understanding (Colaizzi, 1978). In phenomenological research the life-world of each participant is of central importance. According to Giorgi (1975), the life-world means the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind. Life- worlds include emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with the naturally

evolving lives of individuals (Berg, 1989). The life-world is essentially all of a person's physical and affective experiences, and the meanings derived from these experiences.

The purpose of phenomenological research is to illuminate the experience of interest through careful description by way of an intuitive process. By gradually shifting from one's conditioned way of experiencing the world to a more conscious awareness of assumptions or presuppositions, a clearer understanding is possible (Osborne, 1994). Presuppositions include personal biases and preferred theoretical models as well as pervasive cultural prescriptions. Other than Husserl, most phenomenologists do not believe that a pure suppositionless point of view can be achieved. Polkinghorne (1988), in his paper "The Practice of Phenomenological Research," asserts that:

> Although some cleansing of naive suppositions can be accomplished, we cannot rise above our historical and cultural circumstances, nor can we overcome the suppositions inherent in our existence as incarnate beings. Nevertheless, the effort to reach a more open and less personally prejudiced perspective has been basic to most scientific efforts. Natural science employs extrinsic techniques—such as the double-blind—in order to achieve this end. But since the data for phenomenological researchers are directly present in their experience, other devices—such as extensive training and increased self-awareness—are needed. The freedom from suppositions requires a personal integrity and awareness of one's own biases and a continuous check by returning to the "given" itself. (p. 7)

Illuminating "the essence" of an experience implies universality even across cultures. This is an important new way of looking at a "taken for granted" experience, including women's experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause (Levesque-Lopman, 1988). What phenomenology does not do, however, is see the experience in its full context, over time. Social, cultural, and historical information, vital to the understanding of women's experience, living in a particular time and place, is removed.

The hermeneutic refinement of phenomenology partially addresses this criticism. Hermeneutics looks at the embeddedness of the phenomena in question. It allows and respects the dialogical nature of experience and interpretation. Hermeneutics originated in the 17th century, when it came to refer to principles of interpretive study of Biblical texts. Applied to psychology its emphasis is on interpretation, understanding, and meaningfulness of the dialogical, intersubjective, and conversational nature of human experience.

For Gadamer (1982) hermeneutics is an ontology of understanding that stands in opposition to a natural science approach to knowledge. Rather than separating the researcher from the research subject with the aim of prediction and control, its purpose is openness and active involvement in the process of deeper understanding. Hermeneutics disallows natural science's claim to a universally valid truth. Instead, it stresses the historicality of understanding, it is always a seeing of the world from our particular situatedness, as we bring our individual history to the process of understanding.

Hermeneutic analysis has been described as a spiralling process, where our understanding becomes refined and corrected by the work of interpretation leading to an increased understanding and a more complete interpretive account.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry reflects the process of hermeneutic phenomenology. It stresses the collaborative process that is involved in story-telling by a research participant and the re-storying or interpretation of the story by the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Polkinghorne (1994) believes that narratives can "provide our discipline the impetus to move toward its goal of understanding human existence. . . . The narrative way of talking is the way people talk about themselves and, as such, is able to express more faithfully the uniqueness, contextuality, temporality and complexity of people" (p. 16).

Narratives, the stories we tell about ourselves, are a fundamental aspect of lived experience, and perform an integrative function, organizing memories and experiences into a coherent life story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Our temporal organizing of past, present, and future is always creating an ongoing narrative. Constructing a narrative involves attending to context, history, and an understanding of experience. Our dreams, memories, and future plans are often depicted in a narrative form even though they may not have occurred in temporal sequence.

Creating a narrative of one's life is also an integral part of the counselling process. The act of narrating one's story has been shown to be a powerful and empowering

process that gives depth to the understanding of one's self and one's relationships. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) have noted the empowering effect that telling one's story has for a woman, validating the importance of her life history. Steinem (1992) also addresses the significance of a woman reclaiming memories and feelings of her preadolescent self, in order to join with and support her adolescent daughter(s). By reintegrating vital parts that had been "driven underground" a woman gains an authority that comes from the conscious awareness of her own life experiences. Howe (1988) states that a woman's capacity for empathy for her mother may represent an important aspect of psychological development for women. Knowing the context of a mother's life can help women get distance form their mothers, by allowing space to see the differences and then the similarities in order to appreciate who she really is. Otherwise what can happen is that daughters endlessly organize against their mothers or live out unconscious parallels (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993). Using oral narrative inquiry may be particularly well suited to the study of mothers.

Narrative research focuses on the joint venture between the researcher and individuals interviewed. It values the history of each person involved in the study—researcher and research participants—and allows for a storied description to be told of each. It acknowledges the researcher's investment in the chosen topic and locates the researcher's own historical context. This is essential due to the joint process of the research endeavor, not only in eliciting information, but in its interpretation as well. Both

participants involved in the process affect and are affected by what is said. Both are changed in the process.

Feminist Considerations

Uncovering women's perspectives involves careful attention to language and silence. Women are sensitive to cues suggesting what is expected of them. In the research setting, the likelihood of them responding to demand characteristics is high. Feminist researchers are aware of this and of women's dual, often conflicting perspectives (Heilbrun, 1989). Anderson and Jack (1991) have observed how expression of women's experience is often muted because their interests and experiences are at variance with those of men:

> A woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience . . . to hear women's perspectives accurately, we have to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them. (p. 11)

For mothers, this is pronounced. Their reliance on external referents, primarily white, male professionals, over the past few decades has been extensive (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Oakley, 1981, Penfold & Walker, 1983).

Feminist research is careful to address the way in which the research relationship influences the construction of a woman's narrative. Allowing time and space for women to speak openly about their lives and interrelationships requires trust and a non-judgmental atmosphere. Oakley (1981) feels that in departing from conventional interviewing procedures the role of the researcher changes dramatically. She recommends an interactive, non-hierarchical and personalized process as the most respectful and elucidating. Harding (1987) also emphasizes the involved role of the researcher as essential to good research, that instead of assuming a detached experimenter approach, the feminist researcher acknowledges biases, is invested in the study, and works closely with the individuals who are being interviewed.

In summary, a feminist narrative inquiry is a human science approach that seems to offer a refreshing alternative to studying the mother-daughter relationship. Instead of the mechanistic and organismic natural science methods that have not directly addressed mother's experiences, this human science approach provides an appropriate framework for studying the experiences of mothers from a new perspective.

Selecting the Participants

In human science research, participants are chosen on the basis of their ability to illuminate the phenomena in question. They are not selected according to the logic of sampling theory or other criteria that will ensure statistical generalizability (Polkinghorne, 1988). The basic qualifications for interview participants, according to Becker (1986), is

that they have salient experiences of the phenomena in their everyday worlds and are able to articulate descriptions of their experiences.

With the method and considerations for a new approach to studying mothers in mind, I talked to women about my study. The five women who decided to participate surfaced quickly and easily. They heard of the study during informal conversations with me or by word of mouth and expressed interest in talking about their experiences of mothering adolescent daughters. The first interview, a pilot study, was done in 1992 in Vancouver. The following four interviews took place in either Vancouver or Victoria, British Columbia between January and July 1996.

Pilot Study

In order for me to explore the nature and quality of the interview/conversations I wanted to use, I arranged a preliminary "pilot" conversation with a woman who had expressed a previous interest in participating in my study. The dialogue allowed me to "try out" my research ideas, acknowledge some of my pre-understandings and assumptions about the experience, and decide the relevance of some of the topics to be addressed.

We decided to meet at her home and began rather informally. As a comfortable connection developed, I outlined my research interest. Confidentiality was stressed and a "Consent to Participate" form was completed (see Appendix A). It was understood that the conversations would be taped, transcribed, then erased upon completion of the

research. I also assured her that she could choose to not answer a particular question or questions and could withdraw from the study completely at any time. I asked clearly if she wanted to use her own name or a pseudonym and allowed her to change any identifying information.

Blythe, the woman involved in the pilot study, had one daughter, Sara who was 23 years old at the time of our discussion. Blythe had been a young single parent who had worked in a clerical position outside the home. She raised her daughter in metropolitan Toronto, and had many memories and experiences of mothering her during adolescence. She talked about these in relation to her own context, including her background, her relationship with her own mother, and the historical context of her parents' lives. After the first discussion, we arranged to meet a week later to continue. This worked well for Blythe since between the sessions she thought of more experiences that she wanted to share.

The pilot study was important for me as a researcher. I recorded my feelings and impressions after each of the two conversations that we had. An important realization that I had during this process was how much I could shape the interview. I noticed that not only could I influence the direction of the conversation by the questions or topics I posed, but that the vocabulary and theoretical concepts inherent in a discussion of adolescence could not be ignored. I also realized that women may not be able to talk about their experience separate from theoretical conceptualizations—especially of mothering

and of adolescence. Nonetheless, I wanted to hear what mothers would say and I wanted to minimize my influence as the researcher, to see if, in fact, traditional psychological theory had filtered down to a woman's experience of mothering a daughter. Given the vulnerability to societal criticism, I wondered if any mother in our culture could be free from the worry that she was doing something wrong in her mothering.

Listening to the Stories

After the pilot study, I decided to follow the same introductory, consent, and confidentiality process that I had with Blythe. Conversations were arranged subsequently with four women. I asked each woman clearly if she wanted to use her own name or a pseudonym and enabled each woman to change any identifying information. Some women made changes in names and details, others wanted me to use their actual names and information. Their requests were respected.

Each initial meeting began with an overall description of my research. I explained that I was interested in their experience because, although there was a lot of theoretical literature about mothers, little research involved mothers' perspectives. To reduce my influence, I also decided to ask fewer questions, in order to give each woman more freedom to discuss what she thought was most important and relevant. The interviews began with an opening such as: "I'd like to ask you to reflect on your experience of mothering a daughter, especially what your experience was like throughout her

adolescence. I'd like you to describe in your own words things that happened and how you felt. You can talk about anything that stands out for you."

Each woman began with whatever she chose. I used frequent indicators such as, "Um hm," a smile, or a nod to show that I followed and understood what she was saying. I introjected minimally, only when it was necessary for me to clarify or understand certain points more fully. Initially, some of the women were concerned with the open nature of the conversation format that I proposed. For example, Nikohl said, "I'm sure in 21 years of mothering certain events are more meaningful than others. I hope these come out." I nodded and she continued, "I'll try. I'll trust the process. So I won't worry about what is the best example." Then I said, "That's good. I think that's the best way to do it. I'll trust too, that what comes will be what is important." And trusting was also a part of my process. At one point, in my research journal, I wondered how I would represent these five seemingly different narrative accounts.

During the interview/conversation each woman decided how and what she would tell. I clarified in places, sometimes asked questions, and occasionally shared my ideas. I was aware of naturally validating or supporting the woman, reminding her of the context of her situation where it was appropriate to indicate understanding and assuring I would not "judge" her. For example, in an interview with Catherine, she describes a vulnerable time in her marriage:

My husband had an affair when my baby was about 2 months. . . . The marriage nearly broke up then. I went to see a counsellor. He went to see a counsellor. The counsellor told me, after I made the decision to leave him, that it was a wise decision. . . . And it wasn't a wishy-washy little female that sat across the table taking it. . . .

Well, you had a 2-month-old baby and a 1-year-old, right?

Yeah, that's right. So you see, he sent me flowers and said, "To my wife, my life, I need you more now than ever." I still remember and I stayed. Because I was so scared to leave the two young children and had no money and no place to go, that I didn't leave. . . .

The initial interview with each woman took between 45 and 90 minutes. A second interview was arranged subsequently with each one. Between the interviews, I suggested that the women could reflect on their experiences of mothering during the period of their daughters' adolescence, that they could look at photographs to remind themselves of other memories, or that they could just let memories surface at the time of the second meeting. My own process after the initial meeting was to make notes of my thoughts and feelings that had arisen during the conversation. I began the second interviews by asking if the woman had had a chance to reflect further on our conversation. Invariably she had. Second interviews again, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and I collected approximately 3 hours in taped interviews per woman in total.

Meeting the Mothers

After the pilot conversation with Blythe, the next interview was arranged with Nikohl. She had expressed interest in participating from the first time I met her, in 1992. Our interviews took place in May 1996. She was 48 years old and of French Canadian heritage. I knew her experience would be unique. Nikohl was in the advanced stages of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). When I met her she was in a wheelchair with very limited physical movement, but was an extremely intelligent and articulate woman who had raised four children—two boys, then two girls. (Her eldest was an adopted son.) She separated from the children's father when her two youngest—her daughters—were 5 and 7 years old. She was diagnosed with ALS 3 years later. At the time of our conversations, her daughters were 18 and 21 years old.

When Jane first heard about my study, she was very interested in it, but worried that her experience would not fit the "norm." She also knew that talking about her experience of her daughters' adolescent years would be emotionally painful as during their adolescence, Jane was away from her two daughters for a 4-year period to pursue professional training. When she returned, she separated from her husband. At the time of our discussions, she was 45 and her daughters were 20 and 21 years old.

Catherine heard of my study through a friend and volunteered to participate. She wanted to be involved in order to further process her feelings around her experiences of mothering her daughters. After years of mothering in the role she thought was expected of

her, she had come to question the way she had mothered and the way she had lived for 45 years. Seeing one of her daughters as a mother with a daughter of her own has brought Catherine to some new formulations for mothering and for "being." At the time of our conversations her daughters were 24 and 26 years old.

Beth also volunteered quickly after hearing of the topic of my study. The time of her daughter's adolescence was also marked by Beth's separation and divorce from her husband to whom she had been married for 20 years. She talked about her experiences, feelings, and memories in a way that reconstructed and made sense of this time in her own life and in her daughter's. Beth's own mother had been disabled and in a wheelchair from the time Beth was 5 years old, and this had some bearing on how she mothered. Beth was 42 years old and her daughter was 18 at the time of our discussion.

Delimiting the Study

Although it was not an intended delimitation of this study, all of the women who participated in the interviews had separated or divorced from their daughters' fathers. This event influenced the experience these women had mothering. Naturally, theirs is not the same experience as women who parent within a close and supportive marriage.

Although this characteristic limits this study, it is also important to recognize that a large number of women spend at least part of their time as mothers coping alone. This is not only true for separated and divorced women, though they are the group that comes

to mind when single-parent families are mentioned. There is also a large, but hidden group of women who parent alone inside of marriage (Price, 1988).

Analyzing the Stories

Mothers' experiences are embedded in their particular contexts. Understanding what it means to be a mother of an adolescent daughter requires understanding her context and her story, including how her own experience of being a daughter affected her experience of subsequently mothering one. For two of the women, being a grandmother added another layer to the experience of mothering, giving yet another level of understanding.

I began the data analysis by transcribing each of the interviews, a process that involved listening to each taped conversation over and over again. However, it allowed an in-depth familiarizing with the material. Upon completion, I reread each transcript while listening to the audiotape. Then I gave each woman a copy of her complete transcript in order for her to read it through and check the accuracy of what she had said and how it read. I invited each woman to edit, delete or add any information she wished.

When the transcripts were returned to me, I reread them, combing through each line by line, underlining phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that stood out. I wanted to familiarize myself with every significant detail in each woman's story. To do this I drew on the process I used during my master's program, working as a research assistant with

Dr. Lorette Woolsey at the University of British Columbia, when we did intensive analyses of interviews on same-sex friendship and family bonds. I then wrote underlined segments of the interview transcripts onto individual index cards. After all of the significant statements or paragraphs were written on cards, I organized them into related categories. Some cards were duplicated and placed into more than one category. I used this process as a validation procedure for my narrative analysis.

At this time, I went back to each woman's transcript and reread each while again listening to her tell her story on tape. Two or three main predominant themes surfaced, and for the most part I used the women's own words in the titles of these themes. I called these narrative themes.

I chose these themes on the basis that they had a history in the woman's life and that they had a significant impact on her relationship with her own daughter or daughters. What seemed to happen quite naturally was that as each woman talked about her experience of mothering, she would also refer to her experience of growing up and of her relationship with her own mother. As a result, the themes that surfaced had the element of generational continuity. The mothers were often aware that the theme carried over from their mothers and was present in their relationships with their daughters. Frequently they had hopes, often compensatory in nature, for influencing the pattern for the future.

For Jane, I chose "Being Worth It" and "Being Prepared for the World." For Nikohl, I chose "Creating a Home," "Mothering Differently," and "Feeling Loss and

Appreciation." For Blythe, "Communicating about Sex," "Protecting in a Harsh Reality," and "Single Parenting and Dating" were selected. For Catherine, the themes of "Taking on the Role," "Realizing the Responsibility," and "Redefining One's Self" were chosen. For Beth, "Adjusting to Divorce" and "Feeling Guilty" were the selected themes. The selected titles for each woman represented the significant themes in their individual stories. All of these theme topics were mentioned by at least one other woman; some of the topics were discussed by all of them. Some of the themes also resonated with my own experiences.

A narrative description of each theme was outlined. The theme was traced back through the woman's story, often connecting her quite naturally to her mother and her mother's context. For example, Blythe's theme of "Communicating about Sex" arose from her own story of growing up. She began by talking about how her mother had never discussed sex with her. As a result, Blythe had an unplanned pregnancy at a young age. So for her, talking comfortably about sex with her own daughter was a main priority.

Historical context and their mother's experiences were significant in establishing the identified themes for each woman. Often, as in Blythe's case, the woman identified the theme topic from the past, then talked about a very conscious attempt in the present to convey this differently to her own daughter. The women also held dreams for their daughters that related to these mothering themes. In this way, the past, present, and future of each theme unfolds for this generation of mothers. I did not ask the women to

identify themes themselves, though in a couple of cases—Jane's and Beth's—they used the word "theme" themselves in the context of their story.

After the thematic descriptions were outlined, each woman was consulted again regarding the description of her themes, whether they fit for her, and whether she agreed with how I had presented her story and her themes. After completing the narrative thematic analyses for all five women, I made a copy available to the women who wanted to read all of the stories and analyses. Three of the women reviewed the complete analysis (two were unavailable to do so).

The feedback was very positive. Catherine decided to share the material with her daughter. She reported that as they read through her own account and the accounts of the other women together, they were able to connect at a deep level, feeling that it was giving more closure to the process in a healthy and therapeutic way. She thanked me for facilitating this work. Beth and Jane also commented that being involved in the conversations led to thought provoking reflection for days after the conversations. Beth said that she appreciated the overall experience of sharing her story.

Chapter IV: The Mothers' Stories

Introduction

The mothers' stories are laid out under the narrative theme titles that were drawn from their individual stories as follows: Jane's story is told under "Being Worth It" and "Being Prepared for the World." Nikohl's story is told under "Creating a Home," "Mothering Differently," and "Feeling Loss and Appreciation." Blythe's story comes under "Communicating about Sex," "Protecting in a Harsh Reality," and "Single Parenting and Dating." Catherine's story is told under "Taking on the Role," "Realizing the Responsibility," and "Redefining One's Self." Beth's story is told under the theme titles of "Adjusting to Separation and Divorce," and "Feeling Guilty."

Each woman's "story" is taken from the written transcript of the conversations that I had with her. It is presented, as much as possible, as it was told in the context of our conversation. My interview comments are included in italics. In order to present appropriate sections of her story under each theme title it was occasionally necessary to move or reorganize sentences or paragraphs of the text. When this was done, ellipsis

points (. . .) are used.[2] Each woman was consulted regarding the themes of her transcript and the presentation of her story under these themes.

Jane's Story

The predominant themes in Jane's story are "Being Worth It" and "Being Prepared for the World." Her story is presented under these headings.

Being Worth It

"Being Worth It" was an attitude that Jane wanted to instill in her daughters. During her own childhood she was aware of a different message, "It's good enough for the children," that came from her mother and an aunt. This message had deep implications for Jane and became a significant focus for her in the mothering of her own daughters.

> Jane: My mother, Beverly, was born in Winnipeg in 1919. . . . My grandmother died of a surgical procedure when my mother was 4 years old. . . . My mother had two older sisters, 18 and 16 years older than her. Anne, the second oldest was probably Beverly's mother figure or role model. She was a very domineering woman, who teased and sarcastically "dug" at people. We lived with Anne and her

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[2] When material within a sentence is omitted three ellipsis points (. . .) are used. Four points (. . . .) indicate that there is an omission between two sentences. When the points are used at the beginning or end of a paragraph or section, this indicates that the piece has been moved from elsewhere in the text.

husband in Winnipeg for 9 months when my dad was in Europe in 1955-56. The attitude that "it was good enough for the children" was initiated with Anne and my mother tended towards that philosophy.

. . . I wore hand-me-downs because my sister was older than I was. I wore hand-me-downs for years. . . . So there was this theme, "Oh, it's good enough for you" and I think it was important. I think it was important in my own feeling that I wasn't important enough to be, to think of me first. And so that was a recurring theme for me right up until the time I left for chiropractic college. I had never put myself first. I had always put my husband first, the children first and put me last. And I think there was a theme there with my mother in looking back, and with my mother's sister, that second-hand stuff and second-rate stuff was good enough for the kids.

And where that is of material goods, it still has an effect on the psyche of the child, in that they are second rate and not really important enough, and I tried to reverse that—without going overboard and providing them with incredible things, but I stressed quality and made it an important event in getting the child something good, that it was good quality and that they were worth it. They didn't have a lot of stuff, but what they did have was fairly good quality and I tried to say that they were important enough to have this, not exactly like that but—

Rita: It sounds like you were aware of it, you didn't want them to feel like you had felt in some ways.

That's it, I was aware of it, so I did that without emphasizing it. Anyway, I hope I did that. And even to this day I think my mother criticizes me a bit for getting them something that is of good quality, and I just ignore her. I think, "Fine, that's your opinion." I don't bother bringing it up or explaining why I'm doing it, but I just do it and make sure they are getting something that is the best choice, not the second-best because it is "just" for them. I don't know if the jury is in on that one, whether I have succeeded, but I hear them having more awareness than I ever had. I hear them taking time for themselves, I hear them choosing something that is really good because they have enough feeling of self-worth to do that, rather than to do that for someone else, and I think that is a good thing because then they will survive. If they look after themselves, then from that place they can work outwards to relating to other people and caring for the people they love, and I continue to do that.

It sounds like you have been really quite thoughtful in some of the ways you mothered.

Had I to do it all over again, well, it's all a product of our awareness. I think I tried to do the best that I could with the awareness that I had at the time and I'm sure my parents did the same. And so I tried with as much forethought as I could to

make conscious decisions on how to do it, to the point of putting them first for all those years, and that may have been an error, a tactical error.

Feeling "second rate," putting herself and her own needs behind the needs of her children and her husband set Jane up for some difficult decisions during her mid-30s. When her daughters were approaching adolescence, Jane recognized that her marriage was failing. She realized that she needed a career if she was to survive on her own and this would require further training. This was not an easy decision for her. Out of school for 23 years and reluctant because of a fear of failure that had been her mother's legacy, Jane tested her abilities and then made the decision to go to school full-time in another city.

> My mother completed grade10 and went no further. She left school because at the time, in the Depression era, there seemed to be no future in schooling. Of course she regretted this later and always encouraged my sister and me to get a good education . . . My mother worked from the time I was in grade 3. She began as a file clerk at a medical clinic in Winnipeg and worked her way up to the accounts and collections in that clinic. She worked 16 years.
>
> Mother told me that there was an office manager with whom she didn't "get along" with well. My mother was a capable worker with very little self-confidence. Her boss recognized her abilities and would have her substitute for this other woman when she was away, causing friction between the two co-workers. I asked my mother why she didn't compete for the office manager's job

and she said that she didn't have the education to do this. She never had the self-confidence to allow herself to pursue these things. She said, "What if I would fail at it?"

So she had a great deal of fear of failure, passed on, no doubt, from her sister and mother-figure, Anne. Mother transferred some of these feelings to me—about the fear of failure and I, to my girls, unconsciously, even though I tried to ensure that they had a healthy dose of self-confidence; it's something they must pick up from the mother by osmosis.

In returning to school, going back to university in my middle 30s, I had to overcome those fears of failure—I doubted if I could do it. . . . So I took a couple of courses while they were still, I guess the girls were about 10-ish. I went back to school to see if I could do it and I could. Just fine, there was no problem, it was so much easier. I didn't realize how simple it was, all you had to do was figure out what they wanted. It was a lot easier in 1989 than it was in 1966. . . . I took 2 courses and scored A+ and A, so my confidence was boosted and I knew I would be able to do it.

Jane's decision to pursue further education was difficult one. Then, while away at school, issues of guilt and loss became very strong reminders of the primary role she had played as a mother. She survived by throwing herself into her studies.

But then, when I actually chose to go off to Portland to study, they had to make their own decisions. . . . They were 13 and 15 at this time. They were doing more things themselves. For instance, the music, it began at a very young age for them and it involved me very much because the 15 minutes a day that they needed to put into their music would be done with me and then as time went on they became more and more independent in their practice so that it was something they had to do for themselves. It wasn't something that I, it didn't have to be processed through my ears, they certainly had more intelligent ears than I did in many ways. So they were doing their own practice, doing their own _ hour and developing music practice as an art and it, of course, has to come from the individual—it can't be someone else always helping you or you never develop the critical thinking that is necessary. So they were on their own, they were on their own feet at that time.

So maybe I had a sense that I wasn't needed as much. In many ways, I think stepping back at that time was better for them than smothering them with that kind of direction. It was time for me to step back. Maybe not time for me to step out, but time for me to step back.

They said for them it was a sudden thing, me stepping out and they were completely on their own. I mean they weren't—their father was there, and I came home every month and I called them every day. It wasn't as though I wasn't there, but I wasn't there. . . .

They resented me going quite a bit and so they pulled back from me. I always felt that I was catching up. I always felt that I was making up for something.

Feeling guilty?

Guilty, that's it. That drove a lot of how I tried to make up, and they probably knew it and took advantage of it.

But you were doing what you needed to do for yourself.

Yes, I had to, I just jumped in with both feet. And the amount of studying necessary was overwhelming. It occupied every waking minute, which then made it easier, because I couldn't just sit there and worry about them. I didn't have a lot of idle time, and any idle time I spent sleeping, about 5 hours a night that I happened to get.

And for you, being so busy probably helped you to even do it.

Be away from them. Yes. I couldn't have done it if I hadn't have been that busy. No way. There wouldn't have been a purpose. I would only have done it for a task that huge. Not for anything else.

How many years were you in Portland?

Four. At the outset, I thought I would only be away for 2 because I was under the understanding that the Canadian school in Toronto was going to move here . . . to

this city. They had begun negotiations to do that. So I thought in 2 years they would move. But they didn't and so here I was in the middle of the program and you don't gain anything from not finishing the program, so I had to continue. There was too much at stake. There was too much investment already, so I just continued.

There was a break every 3 months, every quarter, so I came back for 10 days and then I would come back every month, sometimes twice, usually once, and keep in contact by telephone and by letters and then of course the summers. I took the summers off, so that was 3 months, at which time I spent a lot of time with them.

What do you remember of your contact while you were away?

I remember one instance. My daughter called me after school, and she was sobbing and she said (this was the younger one) and she said, "Oh, Mommy, I've done a terrible thing." I thought, "My God, what is it?" She was 14. "Done a terrible thing, a terrible thing." I said, "Just settle down, dear, just sit down and tell me what it is." She was at home alone and, like all kids, she started investigating and she found some Ukrainian Easter eggs that had been given to me by my uncle and so she took them out and started playing with them. Well, of course. And she broke one. And she said, "Oh, it broke." And I thought, "Oh, is that all." I didn't want to minimize it too much, so I tried to comfort her and said something like,

"Oh, we'll put it back together," or whatever. That was her most traumatic moment when she broke something that she thought was very precious of mine.

While you were away.

While I was away, and maybe by taking those items out, [holding back tears] she felt closer to me.

Being Prepared for the World

"Being Prepared for the World" was another focus for Jane in the mothering of her daughters.

Again to me, what I hear has to do with preparedness. It sounds so much like you wanted for them to be prepared in the world in the way that you weren't at that age.

Yeah, that recurs. I felt that I would have had more self-confidence had I been more prepared for the world. And then I prepared them for the world and wondered why they didn't have more self-confidence. [Laughs] There must be something else there that I was missing. I don't know what it is yet. It is very illusive.

How do you know that—that they don't have more self-confidence?

Well, they don't have that swagger in their walk, you know, that confidence that comes through. And I sensed it when I compared them to other kids and how they

> would react in social situations. Or how they would react to a new situation. They wouldn't just grab it and try it out. Maybe it is just their nature, more like my nature, a little more hesitant. But fair enough. However they are is how they are. But I tried.

This theme addresses an issue that was prevalent for Jane from a young age.

> When I was at school I felt less exposed to many cultural things than my peers. I attended a private girls' school. The girls who went there were generally from well-educated families and had had exposure to music and literature. I felt less in the "know." This was my perception. I was also much younger than the others because I started school very young. It could be that socially et cetera, I was less experienced than the others, who were one to two years older, and so I felt behind them. I hoped to prepare my children better than I was prepared. We went to art galleries and concerts and children's theater and libraries. I tried to keep them from TV as youngsters and started them very early in music.

The feeling of "being behind the others," the lack of self-confidence, and a problem with her body image were obstacles to Jane's self-confidence in her own adolescence. Then, after graduating from the private Catholic girl's school at 16, Jane went directly to a large provincial university. Her undergraduate degree was in science, where for the first 2 years she was the only female student in her classes. Is it any wonder that she felt intimidated and unprepared for the world?

The colors! The clothing that everyone was wearing in the 1960s. After having worn a girls' school uniform where all I needed to do was make sure my uniform was clean and pressed for the next day, all of a sudden I had choices. The campus environment was overwhelming. What a shock!

And how did you deal with the new interaction with males?

There were a whole lot of issues there. I needed a lot of help and the help wasn't there in those days.

Jane's theory that being prepared and knowledgeable about the world would instill confidence in her daughters was based on her own experience of not being prepared and not feeling very confident. Believing that she had influence, Jane thought she could promote the self-confidence of her daughters. There is a sense of wanting to give them important tools for living and of wanting to spare them from the difficulties that she herself experienced.

They felt self-conscious sometimes, or less self-confident. But this theme to me seemed to recur, although it is the very thing that I wished to safeguard against. Being a creative individual was very important to me and I encouraged the girls to be creative. I knew that the self-confidence issue was very important to the creative abilities and it would frustrate me to see them lack confidence and not want to explore and try new things or discover the world.

Nikohl's Story

Nikohl addressed many important issues in our conversations about mothering her adolescent daughters. For her, some of the primary themes were "Creating a Home," "Mothering Differently," and "Feeling Loss and Appreciation."

Creating a Home

"Creating a Home" for Nikohl was much more than providing a warm and comfortable shelter for her children. She described what "home" meant for her:

> Nikohl: We've always had an open relationship, and by that I mean they are themselves around me and I am me around them, so the feeling around being at home is at home, that you don't have to be careful. You are at home, you say what you feel like saying and you are the way you are at home. So that's what we have here, we have a home. We are not on our best behavior around here, we are ourselves, and the kids too. And I know that other adults have found that difficult around me and my kids because my kids are not more careful around adults. Like my mother, for example. She thinks younger kids need to show a certain respect and my kids do respect adults. They will not offer, hmm, they will deal with you like an equal. They will not be disrespectful or use sarcasm or put you down. No, they will deal with you like an equal and they deal with me as an equal and that's how I raised them, and that's important to me because they are equal.

The importance of what a real home was came from her experience of not having one as a child.

> I was raised in a home without love, I was raised in a home that had food and clothing, but there was no communication. No talking about emotions, nothing. Well, I was not going to be, uh, I was not going to have a home like this. And that's why I left. That home was not, what I thought, the best place to be . . . So I left . . . I think I would have liked to go back home but they never asked me back.
>
> There were 4 of us (siblings) in our home and we were all raised apart, like a real dysfunctional family. No trust in each other and we had to work on it. I still have to work on trusting them. It's not natural.

So, for Nikohl, home denoted: being yourself; accepting one another; communicating openly, especially about emotions; and working out conflict. The type of mutual respect, openness, and acceptance that Nikohl promoted in her home environment became an important foundation for her family when, in 1986, they were faced with Nikohl's diagnosis of the terminal illness Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).Her daughters were 8 and 10 years old at the time.

> *Rita: It sounds like there is a lot of acceptance for who you are as individuals, each of you.*
>
> Yes, totally, and I don't know how much that would be if I did not have this disease. I don't know, I can't tell you, because I do have it. I think that it helped us

move into a place of truth faster though. . . . I think a lot has to do with my disease. Because we've gone to grief counselling together . . . I think it has made us go through life a different way though. We worked together through grief at learning how to be joyful with each other.

I think for them it is normal, for them the fact that I have a wheelchair, it is totally normal and they are not more careful with me because I am in a wheelchair. . . . My relationship with them is excellent and when something doesn't go well we talk about it or we argue or we deal with it so we don't have any resentment or anger that's accumulated. We deal with it in the moment. . . . So if we have any kind of tension then let's deal with it and let's put it on the table, and let's explode, and after we explode, we go back to a working relationship and then we go on.

About three years ago I was very, very ill also, and I really thought that was going to be it then, so that period of time was hard for them. I was very ill, I was not sure I would make it out of that. I really thought that was it. So that was hard and I think from that period we have gone through a joy of living—that was really unique because we went so low. But now we're back into the normal stuff. We forgot that awhile back now. So now we're back into—I'm a total normal woman in that I'm not diseased, I'm not handicapped. . . . I like that they see me whole and not sick.

Nikohl found that this attitude of respect and openness, which some people, such as Nikohl's mother, found uncomfortable, worked very well in a household where she, as a single mother, raised her four teenagers, in the midst of a serious illness.

> I think if you have teenagers and you are really honest with your teenagers, it really shakes your integrity. So I think we were shaken before adolescence.
>
> So the children and I always had an equal relationship and that's important . . . I did not have 90% of the problems that fathers and mothers that I know had, because of that. We did not have power struggles at all. . . . I never punish my kids, my daughters or my sons. I never punish them, ever, and that is for a very good reason. I don't want to take the power away from them.
>
> I never punished them, therefore it never became a big issue in their adolescence when they were having behaviors that were surprising to me or that I did not like. We did what we always did, so I did not have them breaking any rules, right! They were never grounded, therefore they never ran away. . . . Rules—I mean I never had any rules. It's not true. We had, um, I wanted to know where they were at all times, just like they wanted to know where I was, and because I was traveling, that was something we thought should happen—knowing where everybody was because we were all very busy. So, you know, someone could be 10 or 15 or 18 or 30 or 23 [years old], we know even now where everybody is and uh, it's still the same as in adolescence. . . . They knew what I

expected of them, then we negotiated and negotiation was always possible and that would go both ways.

Now I'm not saying that it was always pink. I remember sitting on my bed crying, knowing that I was powerless—knowing that they would try the acid trip, I knew they would because they told me they would. They always asked my opinion. They didn't always take it but they always asked me, and they know this is really, really important to me. So as they grew up and got older, this was a big success, that they are open and ask me for my opinion, but I remember when they told me what they were going to do that night, feeling really afraid inside, so I had moments like this because knowing what they were going to do is not easy at times. I understand why parents choose not to know.

Dealing with conflict was also very important for Nikohl. From her own experience of not having been able to express anger in her family of origin, Nikohl believed this was a skill she and her children could learn. It was something she emphasized with her adolescents.

I'm not saying that they always do what I like, oh no! Uh uh. They don't, but you know, they explain to me and I explain to them and sometimes it is louder than others. But that's all right for us to argue. It's all right to debate. It's all right to talk loud. And we do sometimes. Especially now, too, where the three daughters—my two daughters and I are really together here with another woman

caregiver. So it's like we're only women in the house. Well, you know when we're all PMSing at the same time the sparks are flying, and loudly too.

Anger. That was very, very important to me that they learn how to be angry with me, that if they could be angry with me they could be angry with anybody, which I now know is not true with their dad, but it surely helps that they know how to get angry with me. But that did not transfer to their relationship with him. But mind you, the eldest one, Jennifer, is now letting him know more and more, but Allison, she cannot talk to her dad. She is very angry but she can't even tell him yet. So that did not transfer on to all relationships.

But I really thought, you see, I did not get mad at my mother, ever . . . So I made sure that the children, as the children and I grew up together, that learning how to deal with anger is one thing. Sadness, and all those emotions are important.

Since I found out that I have ALS, I wanted the kids to see me work at my relationship with my sister and brother. It was important for me that they keep each other's presence, on purpose, not because ugh, they had to. So only talking about it was not good enough for me. I had to do it so that when they have issues, they will.

Mothering Differently

Based on her experience as a child, of her home and her relationship with her own mother, Nikohl set out to mother differently:

When I had my diagnosis with ALS, I started changing, you know, I took a different outlook on my life. Different things became important and I looked at my mother's mothering. My mother was a totally traditional, authoritarian woman. So my mothering was not at all based on her.

In opposition? or just—

Um, I was not going to raise my kids . . . My mother is not the kind of mother I'd like her to be. She's not the kind of grandmother I would like her to be. She doesn't know my kids. She's never made an effort to know them and that hurts me. And now she doesn't want to talk to me anymore because she can't stand to see me in a wheelchair. It's too much for her. She chooses as best she can and I know that, but it's not good enough for me . . . She's missing out on great people. . . . So my mother is not a mother by choice or a grandmother by choice. She's a great-grandma nine times, but she is not by choice. So she stayed away from all. Too bad for her. So I am—so is it in reaction of her, I'm sure, yup. It's not getting back at her, just doing it differently.

. . . Mothering grew on me . . . They grew on me. I was not a natural mother. You know, I accepted having kids because I think I felt it was part of being a woman. It was not a very conscious decision—I'm going to have children now. No, I got pregnant and I decided if I kept him or her and I did that with my three kids, my three pregnancies. So it was an after-the-fact decision. I was not a

mother—a goo-goo-gaa-gaa mother, no. I did what I had to do. I offered them love and security and warmth and food and entertainment, but I always kept what I thought that I had to, to keep my own individuality. That took a bit. But it grew on me. Mothering grew on me to what it is now and I'll always be a mother—now I know. And I'm also a crone and I know that I'm a crone, a Mother crone. And that's my job and now I make it my job. It's my job to teach my kids that and to teach my kids certain things. Especially my daughters . . . They should know it for their own children to do it consciously and I'm conscious of starting a very—a new ritual in my matriarchal position. Yeah, and that it's very important that my daughters know about it. We are starting a conscious tangent of life.

It sounds very powerful.

Yup. We are reclaiming it. I am reclaiming it for my ancestors and from my grandmothers and from my mother who did the best she could. I'm not happy with her mothering but she did the best she could.

I like where I'm at though, I like the Grandmother stage. I'm proud to be a Grandmother, the role that I like now and I'm sitting in it, I'm enjoying. So I'm glad to be there at such a young age, 48, and to be consciously a Grandma. I like that.

Another significant factor that made Nikohl much more aware of her role as a mother and how she mothered resulted after her divorce.

> . . . You know when I separated from their dad, being the only parent, I sort of looked at my parenting a lot closer than I did before because I was alone. . . . Being the main adult in their lives made me so much more aware of my responsibilities. . . . I had to think about it in my own head and I think about what would be better instead of just going on automatically. I just did a lot of it automatically before. I think a lot of my mothering skills were not at all screened. So I think being a single mother brought that into my goal and I was a lot more conscious of everything. Wanting them to have as much joy and as much pleasure as before [the divorce].
>
> The fact also that I was a minority and they were majority was something. I'm very very collegial, in my approach. I'm not authoritarian. I've never been and never will and so I feel, so I always felt my children were involved . . . So anyway, the decisions that were made around their education, around their schooling, or around their activities were discussed with them, not with their dad.

Nikohl also sought out help from counsellors when she had problems.

> Jennifer started to be self-destructive. She had stopped sucking her fingers when she was 6 years old and then at age 9 she started, when she was tense or nervous, to rub her eyelashes between her fingers. It was just nerves. And the more nervous she was of the problems that were not of her own doing, the more she did it and she would do it all the time. It scared me a lot. I did not know how to handle it. I wanted to take the stress out of her shoulders and I did not know how. Well! This

is not all my job. I know that now. But then, it was, I felt, my job to protect her from that kind of stress.

If you were a good mother then you would be able to do that?

Yeah, with this in mind I went to see a counsellor to talk to her about it. Then I realized that this is not my problem. Jennifer has her problems, they're not diminished here but they are Jennifer's problems . . . So I think that by talking to other people I kind of relaxed into the kind of mother I thought I should be. And after that being a single parent did a lot of good for me. So I think knowing all of this I became a lot more conscious of my skills or my lack of skills and I would go and talk to these people a lot more frequently than before.

Virginia Satir is good. She helped me a lot. And reading her helped me be strong before I was and to let me be the kind of mother I'd like to be and not let me be influenced by everybody else.

I came across something that talked about how mothers want what's best for their daughters and sometimes that would be a conflict. Did you ever feel like that was a conflict for you, that you needed to shape them in one way that would be acceptable for society, or was this more straightforward, that you wanted them to be the best for themselves?

Well, you see, we are a minority. My kids were educated in the French language, therefore we are a minority, living in a majority. So that allows us to be a bit

different and it's OK. . . . My son, who was an individual, had a different haircut. . . . He wore pig runners. So it's like, you're different. Fine. Okay, you can [be different] for show if you want and I'll support you, whatever you want to do for sure. But I never felt the conflict, the cheating or such. I never felt a hypocrite. Maybe I did, I don't remember. I think the fact that we are minority in a majority, I think that we are kind of accustomed to this.

My value is not on conforming, my value is on originality, therefore with them to be non-conformists is a plus for me. It's a value. And that's a French value . . . so I think that we have the best of both worlds.

Feeling Loss and Appreciation

"Feeling Loss and Appreciation" was another theme that Nikohl painfully described.

They are part of my identity. I would not be the same if I did not have children, if I did not have daughters. Now you see I am living the emptiness. I'm starting to live that. My daughter, my youngest one is leaving, and she's leaving for a year. I know she's leaving on the 5th of July and I'm starting to feel already that she'll be gone. And, for the past year or so I have known that and I've known that Jennifer is leaving also in a year so it's like my identity—who I am. I'm tied to my children. And who I am and who I like to be, uh, is interested in and spent a lot of time thinking and talking about my kids, and now that they're leaving I won't be, I

won't have their daily ritual. I won't have that part of me. Visiting or—so I'm going to be left with a big hole of time to do and time to think—they won't be there anymore. I won't be involved in their daily life so I won't have to think about food, I won't have to think about daily things around them neither. Not that I prepare their food. I don't, they do their own preparation. But I still think and talk about food with them and, uh, talk about clothing. I don't buy their clothing but talk about it related to either the fashion or the weather. So that's going to be gone. Nutrition. We talk about nutrition daily. They're gone! I'm not going to talk about that anymore. Reading or shows or movies or plays or—we talk about it and I won't do that either. So you have part of my social part of me that's leaving—part of who I am, which is the mother of those two daughters—they're gone. So part of me's gone.

Now I know that and need to get ready for that time. I'm dreading it. I already have fears. I know I'll live and I'll be fine. I'll find myself. I'm not looking forward to it. I like being in their life. I like them being in my life. And I'm not looking forward to that at all. It's too short—I thought I was in for at least 50 years. I find 18 and 20 years is too short. Definitely. I didn't think like that when they were younger. When they were all around 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, I thought, when is it going to end? But now, since they've been teenagers, I'm kind of sad that that part is over. I know something else is coming but I'm sad. So I don't

know what I'm going to do. I don't know. I know I have to come up with new dreams for me. I'll identify myself differently and I know I will keep myself busy. I'm not worried about that. I think it's the emotions. I have a lot of nurturing coming through my children and that won't be there and I'll have to look for that. I'll have to replace it. Not that I, uh—so I guess my friends, my needed friends, I kept in touch with, but now I'll have to keep in touch even more because I'll have them more than I'll have my kids. So that mirror that's coming, I'm not looking forward. They're leaving, therefore part of me is leaving. I have to look at a new identity.

My two sons—one of my sons was away too for a while and that, and my first son is talking about moving to Alberta with my grandson this year. So within a year I might lose them all. And it's not something I wanted or asked for. And I think if you had done that interview 10 years ago I would have said I could hardly wait until they go. No, I like spending time with them. I'm happy, I'm happiest when they're all here. Even if it's noisy and even if they argue and it's noisy and they come with their music—Tragically Hip—I still like that better than them gone.

What makes Nikohl's story more powerful is that she died in the fall of 1996. Her death was unexpected in the sense that she was recovering from a previous complication of her disease.

Blythe's Story

Becoming a young, single mother determined much of Blythe's life. The themes that stand out in her story are related to her experiences and learning. The three chosen themes are entitled "Communicating about Sex," "Protecting in a Harsh Reality," and "Single Parenting and Dating."

Communicating about Sex

Learning about sex was an early life lesson that had profound consequences for Blythe. It was of utmost importance for her to educate her daughter in this area.

> Blythe: I came from a home where my parents told me nothing and as a result I didn't have much knowledge. I was naive. When I became pregnant with Sara, it wasn't planned, I wasn't married, and it happened partly because I was naive. I think I probably had the basics, but back in that time, pre-70s, not as many women used the Pill as much as today. It was more shrouded in mystery and of course the age-old "Oh, it won't happen to me." So I took a risk and became pregnant.
>
> I remember my parents saying to me years and years later that they wished that they had told me more and talked about important things like this and wished that they had made it easier for me to ask questions because that wasn't done. So when Sara was growing up I thought if there is one thing I am going to do is ensure that she knows. I'm not going to hide it from her. I'm going to be as

honest and straightforward with her as I can. I thought it was really important to do that. And to this day—she is 23 now—we still talk very openly.

Rita: Did you ever feel conflicted within yourself in talking about some of these issues?

I didn't feel a lot of conflict, because I really felt that, as her mother, it was my job to give her as much information as I could, that I had access to, and that it would enable her to make the right decisions for herself. I felt really keenly that knowledge is power. We talked about birth control. When she started seeing her first real serious boyfriend she was in grade 10. I talked very candidly. I said, "Sara, if you are going to have sex with your boyfriend you should make sure you are safe. Don't take risks with it." I didn't feel concerned that if I gave her the information she would go out and have sex. I didn't feel frightened that she would start having sex and what would I do to stop it. Again I felt this was a normal part of her life and that I should give her the information.

When she was in grade 9, 10, 11, the kids started experimenting with drugs, and girls would have relationships with their boyfriends and started having sex. Sara would ask me questions. She would say, "My girlfriend, such and such, thinks she might have an STD." She'd ask anything I could tell her about pregnancy, sex, or periods. She would talk to her friends and sometimes they didn't have all the information so she would come to me. I think she felt safe in

asking because she knew I would give her as much information as I could, and that I would never be judgmental in giving her what she needed.

She called me not too long ago with a problem she was having, and we always talk very openly and I feel relieved that she can call me and tell me anything and she knows that I won't say, "Oh Sara, how could you let this happen?" I try never to be judgmental with her, to instead have a really open mind, and with that she talks to me and tells me things. For me it is important because it is like a bond that I didn't have with my mother, we didn't share the same kind of intimate relationship.

. . . I'm sure there are a lot of women who are just as open with their daughters, but I have also talked to lots of women who felt that ignorance—"Don't tell them, they shouldn't know this"—would in some way protect them, but I don't agree.

Protecting in a Harsh Reality

The protected world that Blythe experienced as a child turned into a much harsher reality when she became a single mother to her own daughter, Sara. The three generations of women—Blythe's mother, Blythe, and Sara—experienced very different worlds and their values reflect this. The theme "Protecting in a Harsh Reality" encompasses the economic struggle Blythe and Sara experienced, the guilt and worries that Blythe felt as a

single working mother, and the sexual violence and violence against women that they experienced in their lives living in a large city.

> Blythe: My mother was a great role model as far as mothering goes because she was a great mother. I often thought about what a wonderful life she provided for me and my brother. She was really loving and kind. She made my growing up very special. My dad contributed too. I sometimes call it magical. I was very protected and very loved, I was very lucky. . . . I sometimes think Sara didn't have it that good, she didn't have it that easy, she had to learn life harder and quicker than I did. I had a buffer that she didn't have.
>
> . . . I came from the old traditional background—all my mother wanted was for me to get married. The first fellow that I had a relationship with, I think I was 19. We went together, he was a really nice guy, I wish I could meet him now [laughing]. What a fool, I threw him away. And my mom, all she wanted was for me to get married, because that is what she had done, and my parents were worried about that and they thought that somehow all they needed to do was to encourage me to get married. . . . and I was really determined to go and do what I wanted to do. They were probably really worried about me, thinking, "Oh, she'll never make it." They thought I needed protection but I wasn't interested in getting married, which probably would have had a really safe and secure life but I just

wasn't interested. I wanted to live a little and boy, I did. So I did a lot of things that I probably shouldn't have, but I had to do it my way, and I did.

I wanted Sara to be a better survivor. My parents did protect me but I don't always believe that that is the best thing. And kids do have to go out and learn about life, not that they should necessarily learn the hard way, but you can't always protect them. . . . Sara knew a lot more about my life than probably a lot of other people did because we lived so intimately. Sometimes I say that we grew up together because I was so young and immature when I had her, so I had a lot of growing up to do and Sara grew right along with me. It probably wasn't so easy for her at times.

. . . [Sara] would say, "Mom, I never want to have the same sort of life that you had because it was too hard and I never want that for myself," and so one of the things she used to say to me was that she would marry someone who had a lot of money. So in our discussions I would say, "But Sara, what you are saying is that you want to find a man who will provide for you rather than seek it out for yourself, and I don't agree with that." Like one of my beliefs is that you can have the house, the cars, everything, but you still might feel really lonely with your mate if you don't really love one another—for the good old-fashioned values—and I said, "I just don't think you can marry for money and be happy," but that's what I always believed and I don't really know if that's true. It seems to me that a

lot of people do and they seem to do okay. So I start to wonder if what I just said was right. She would say, "Mom, I really don't want to be like you at all," not in terms of the kind of person I was, but she wouldn't make the kind of choices I did. She would say that she wanted to make sure that she would be okay, and a lot of that had to do with economics. She thought I was a hippy and had hippy values.

[S]he would say, "You always look on the bright side of things and see things through rosy colored glasses," and she says, "Mom, that's not the way life is." I don't think I do that, but that's the way she perceives it. She often gives me lectures and advice like, "Why don't you get a better job that pays a lot more money?" In her view everything boils down to money, which it does in a lot of cases, but that seems to be, right now, her whole thrust, like how to get money so you can have this great life. She's not very realistic about the other parts of it though.

. . . I really wanted to be a good mom to her, as good as I could be and to feel so divided because you had to go to work and all the things you had to do, and a lot of times I just didn't have enough time. I questioned myself sometimes, like when Sara would react really strongly at times, and I would think, "Now is this going to traumatize her for life?" and "Will she grow up with insecurities?" because she seemed to be insecure. She sucked her thumb for about 10 years and I

used to worry about that and I used to think that maybe inside she is a seething heap of insecurities because her dad left and because I always had to work.

So the guilt nagged at you?

Yes, she had to let herself into the house a lot of times after school when she got older. She was a latchkey kid. And I remember one of the worst things that happened was in our neighborhood, which was a decent neighborhood. We always lived in good neighborhoods because I thought that was really important, that we lived someplace that was always decent, where she could meet kids and go to school right there and feel secure. And one of her little classmates was found murdered. I was so frightened by that because it happened right on our street—the little girl had been taken right from the park, the very park that Sara played in, after school when I wasn't even home. I mean Sara was older, but still a kid, and I thought, I can't protect her.

That must have been really frightening.

It was. I was really scared. I thought it could have been Sara, only Sara was pretty smart. I streetproofed her. We made sure she knew about strangers, that sort of thing. Then Sara's dad and I talked about this and I told her father he would just have to be there for her because I couldn't. I was at work every day from 9 to 5 and couldn't get home till 5:30. So I said, "You just have to make sure you'll be

there for her, that she'll be protected." We talked a lot about that. She was pretty freaked out too. She knew the little girl and it really scared her too.

Was that something that came up at any other time, issues around sexual violence or violence towards women? Did you ever have conversations about those kinds of issues?

Yes, I would talk to Sara about being very careful and once something quite dramatic happened. A girlfriend of mine was a single mother as well and she had a little boy the same age as Sara. We lived in the same house for quite a few years. Through Janie, I met a friend of hers. He was in his 50s by then and he was the kind, older man who loved children and he would offer to babysit for us if we wanted to go out to a show. We were always scrambling for babysitters and we never got to go out together because we were always looking after each other's kids, and she had known this man for years, 20 years or so, and she trusted him, so I didn't think anything of it. One day he said he would take the three kids over to his apartment while we all went to the show in the afternoon and planned to come back and all have dinner together. Sara was about 9. I had even gone to the show with him before a couple of times. We were friends. He would always take us out, would call us up to check if we were okay—an amiable older man.

A few years later he moved to Edmonton and I remember he sent me all these letters. I thought he had gone a little strange, and I said to Sara, "Sara, I don't

know what is going on with John, but he wrote me nine letters in one day and wanted to marry me." And she said to me, "Mom, I never told you this before, but John is not a good man. While you were at the show he did something really weird." And I thought, oh no, the word "weird." So then she went on to describe the situation where he went into the washroom and he started to wash his penis in the sink and had all the children watch him through the crack in the door. He didn't touch them. I asked her if he had them touch him or if he touched any of them but she said he hadn't, that he just wanted them to watch him. Of course, inside I was losing it, but I didn't want Sara to see my reaction, so I said, "Sara, why didn't you tell me this when it happened? I would have really liked to have known that," because inside I thought, because I would like to kill him. She said that she was frightened to say anything because he had told them that if anyone told, he would hurt one of us. So this man was sick. I called Janie after Sara had gone to bed, and I said, "That monster," and we talked about it for a long time, but at first she didn't believe it, and I said, "I never want to see him. Don't ever tell me about him, don't talk about him." He had moved to Edmonton by that time, but as it turned out years later he took another little girl from a welfare mom and sexually molested her and they arrested him. I told Janie, "I knew it, because I knew Sara was telling the truth." So that gave us something to think about; this seemed like the kind of thing you read about. So I was just glad that he hadn't

done anything else because she wasn't traumatized by it or anything, but she knew this man was sick.

Single Parenting and Dating

As a single, working mother, Blythe struggled financially and at times felt overwhelmed with demands of both roles. Although she was aware that living with another partner could alleviate some of the pressures, she did not feel it was "fair" to introduce a stepfather figure into her daughter's life.

Blythe: [In] all the years that Sara and I lived together I didn't live with a man. I had boyfriends, but at that time I didn't want to live with anyone because I didn't think it was fair to Sara. I thought it was just fairer if we lived together, then I wouldn't have to work out all this other stuff with a stepfather or predominant male in the house.

. . . Prior to her adolescence—13 or 14—she was very possessive and I always had to be there for her and I was . . . we were very close. Sara was in many ways very possessive of me . . . She didn't like to share me with anyone. It was a struggle for me at times, because as a single mother my social life was important to me as well. . . . I probably did things that weren't very wise and maybe made her feel insecure. She hated me to have boyfriends. She hated that the most. Probably it wouldn't fizz on her now, but when she was 13 that's when it was the worst.

> . . . As she became more socially integrated with her friends and as she began to go out more and went to their homes, she wasn't quite as interested in staying home with me.

What is interesting from Blythe's story is that, although she never felt she was like her mother in the self-sacrificing style, Blythe's story does suggest some "sacrifice" in terms of her adult dating relationships.

> And of course my mother gave me lots of advice on how to be a mother, but I certainly was never like my mother. She was very self-sacrificing and I wasn't. I didn't live my whole life for Sara, whereas my mother lived most of her life for my brother and I. . . .
>
> Once I went out with a really nice guy. He was good to Sara, too, and would go out of his way to make sure she didn't feel she was being pushed aside, but she still felt threatened. One night he stayed over and I remember the bedroom door all of a sudden crashed open and Sara was just absolutely livid. I guess that she figured out in her 13-year-old mind that I was having sex with my boyfriend and she took it really hard. She went into her bedroom and trashed it. I didn't know what to do. She didn't forgive or forget about that for a long time. It took her a long time to accept him but when she did we all got along well, but he had been the first man I had a relationship with since her dad [13 years prior] so that

is probably why it was so hard on her and that's probably why she was so upset at the time.

Catherine's Story

Catherine began her motherhood journey by following the role models that were set out for her by her mother, her doctor, and the media. The theme "Taking on the Role" describes how she tried to follow a prescription for being a wife and mother. "Realizing the Responsibility" is another theme that seemed to come with the role she had taken on. "Redefining One's Self" has been Catherine's most recent theme, and one that relates strongly to her new mode of mothering.

Taking on the Role

Catherine: I didn't get to breastfeed my children. That's one of my biggest misses, because the doctor said.

Rita: The doctor said you shouldn't?

Yeah. And no one did. And my mother hadn't. I didn't want to do it because no one else was, and my structure was that I did what everyone else did. So even now, if I want to do something I will ask. I know the answer right here [hand over heart] and I don't have to ask nobody, but I will go out and ask everybody because that was where I came from and I had to do whatever everyone else did. I was a copy. I wasn't me. I was a copy of everyone out there, so if nobody else was

breastfeeding, certainly I wasn't going to. I didn't even ask, because nobody was. You know, if I had seen one person, I might have thought, "Oh." But someone would have to go before me—and yet in other areas I would have gone first, but not in motherhood.

I carried Dr. Spock in my back pocket. The bloody book didn't say anything! I think he is off the market now. I read the ones that they have now for my granddaughter, you know the ones they have now—What to Expect in the First Year—I read those. My daughter is natural, she doesn't do—she doesn't read a book. She says, "Get out Gramma's book." They should call it "Gramma's book." These books are wonderful. At least they tell you something. Spock would say, "Go to the doctor," "Just go see your doctor." I think he's off the market now, thank God.

And did you go to the doctor?

All the time. I had no natural instinct.

Or you didn't trust your natural instinct.

Yes, I did not trust it, you see, because I didn't know who I was so I couldn't trust. I was sort of in this space suit that I didn't know who I was so I didn't have any foundation to trust. I didn't know.

. . . [M]y mother was never really there for me, because she was so busy working and so busy in this unhappy marriage, that the role model she set for me was that I had to accept this in my life and that I had to be a good wife. So my whole life was based on being good. And I just accepted all that, what I was supposed to be. . . . Like the role models I had were from the TV. They all said the same things.

. . . You see my mom worked very hard. My father was an alcoholic and they never had much, uh, my mom worked very hard. I was the youngest of three children. My brothers were 12 years and 8 years older than I was.

My brother was probably one of the biggest pains of my life. The one who is 8 years older than me had done some sexual abuse with me so I really didn't care about him too much and he was my mother's favorite, so that didn't help the situation. And I was always a rebel without a cause in that family, but never doing anything really bad, like, I never did anything that I would think is bad, you know, I would play hooky from school. I didn't like school. But my mother was never really there for me because she was so busy working and so busy in this unhappy marriage. . . . I did not have . . . protection, I was out there by myself. I brought myself up basically.

But I had a really close relationship with my father, strangely enough. He gave me a lot of love. . . . [My mother]'s the one who worked and did the labor,

paid for the bills in the house, kept everything going and my father was the person who—I mean, he didn't cook the meals or anything, my mother did that too—but my father is the one who gave me that tender love. He was the one who nurtured me, I guess. So it's like I have these reversed roles, so I didn't have anything to build on—they were my role models. And I did know from somewhere inside because I remember having shame around that. I didn't talk to anybody about that, I had to hide that type of thing.

So I married young. I knew I shouldn't get married. I felt it in my heart that I shouldn't get married and yet I was probably the one who first started talking about marriage, because the fact being that I had gotten pregnant with him. I was 17, 18. He was the first guy I had ever gone to bed with. The first time I had ever gone to bed with anyone and I got pregnant. It was pretty scary. He was 26 and I was 17. He was a policeman.

My father had always said that if anyone ever did this to me he would have them put in jail. I had the biggest fear that they would put him away that I went and had an abortion. Now I didn't go to a hospital, I had it done in a back alley. A woman was going to do it for me. She nearly killed me is what happened. And for a long time I had a lot of guilt over that and I lived with that guilt, but I think I've been able to master, to release that pain. I'm pretty sure, and I notice that in talking about it, I'm not crying—that is a good sign. Probably I got through

that, but there are times, it's not even in my moral system to do something like that, but that's how I was, to protect other people. I did that. It didn't matter what it did to me, it was to protect them.

. . . The role model she set for me was that I had to accept this in my life and that I had to be a good wife. So my whole life was based on being good. And I just accepted all that, what I was supposed to be. . . .

So I guess because of that, the structure and the thought processes, I felt that I needed to marry him, so I did, when I was 20. Before I did, I actually told him that I didn't think I should be getting married. And he told me to talk to my mother about it.

So I married him. We had a good marriage in many ways. Well, a good marriage in those days, okay. But in trueness to my heart, I can honestly say, I wasn't happy, but to the way I know what happiness is now. But I didn't know happiness, so I couldn't know it. I didn't have that role model or anything to compare it to, so I had happiness because it was more than my mother had. I had protection from this guy, I had safety, and he wasn't drinking and he did supply financial, I mean, as a home and he took care of us. He had a temper, and when I look back now, he was verbally abusive and I didn't even recognize that, because you see he never did what my father did as far as drink and not put food on the table, so I was supposed to take this.

My mother would always tell me, you know, "You always make yourself available for your man," "Never say no," stuff like that, and I believed my mother. That was the only thing I had to believe in. I was also brought up to believe that sex was bad and not to be talked about, so I never did. So we didn't talk about those things. So I guess I thought it was okay, then as the years, um, the unhappier I got in my marriage, I just projected, like I went out there to do those things, like I got involved in sports with my kids and I got involved in work, and I got involved in their activities and I just became a real important person in my kids' lives. Really involved.

. . . [As a mother] nobody really suffered around me because they never had the opportunity to suffer. I did all the suffering for them and they never had to feel the pain because I took the pain for them. I fixed everything. And it was truly a co-dependent, enmeshed situation, you know. So they were protected from a lot of stuff. . .

And your kids. When did they come in your marriage?

It was five years into my marriage before I had my first child. I was 25. That was one of the smarter things I did, I didn't have a child right away. We had five years without children. That was good. My husband never really wanted kids. They are a pain. But he loved his children dearly. So I had the first, then 14 months later

had the second daughter. I had another pregnancy after that, but I lost the baby. So it was just the two of them.

My husband had an affair when my baby was about 2 months. . . . The marriage nearly broke up then. I went to see a counsellor. He went to see a counsellor. The counsellor told me, after I made the decision to leave him, that it was a wise decision, "because when you get older, when your children get older they will hate you for staying. They will not be happy because they won't have respect for you." And it wasn't a wishy-washy little female that sat across the table taking it. I fixed everything. Like I ran the show. Like I controlled him too. Not that he didn't have his own story.

Well, you also had a 2-month-old baby and a 1-year-old, right?

Yeah, that's right. So you see, he sent me flowers and said, "To my wife, my life, I need you more now than ever." I still remember and I stayed. Because I was so scared to leave the two young children and had no money and no place to go, that I didn't leave. And there is a lot of good times that came after that. Like I asked him to leave, and he chose not to and that's okay. I mean, we had a lot of good times after that and some bad times, and he had another affair after that, too. We were all over the place. It wasn't all bad.

Our family was like the role-model family where all the kids in the neighborhood always came. We handled—I didn't only fix the problems in our

family, I also fixed all the neighborhood, and all the kids. I was the local counsellor and so we became this family that could never do anything wrong because we would let down the whole bloody society, and the kids, by then, had developed into this too. We were like the outreach home for anyone in almost every city we lived in.

The only time they might have been a little bit unhappy was when we moved to a new town, because it would take them a while and us a while to establish that we were O Perfect Ones. . . . Neither of them have ever done drugs. They didn't do those things. But how could they? Because they were, like if they didn't get to establish where they came from, I made sure it was established so that they wouldn't feel any pain or hurt. So I was always fixing it.

But I controlled with a real talent. I didn't even know I was doing it because I'd learned that at home. I mean, I could teach control and nobody should have that in their lifetime, but I didn't even know I was doing it. And when people talked about control, I thought, "Oh, God," I thought that was people always telling someone what to do, but I had it down to a fine science. I did it in a very coy way but I controlled. When I got to 45, my area of control got so bloody big, I was like a multinational organization. Too much for one person to handle, so I collapsed, the same way organizations do. That's what happened. I was into so much, but that's how I kept busy.

When our marriage broke up . . . I was in my 40s. One [daughter] was 18; one was 20. One was just graduating from high school and one had graduated, probably in first-year university, somewhere in there. My choice, because I didn't love this guy, and I was fearful of what I would do with these two girls, like where their education would be and who would supply the roof over our heads, and that reminded me too much of how my father had been and I knew I didn't want to go back there. And I didn't have the trust to know that it would be okay. And when my marriage broke, I cried. Oh, my God, I thought this was it, I was going to starve to death. What was I going to do? Now this is a woman who has always had good employment, good jobs, and was capable of being whatever she chose to be. And I was petrified, and finally I thought, I just can't sit here, I'd better do something about it.

And my life has been wonderful. Like I say to him now, "Thank you, for releasing me." Because since, I have traveled to Europe, to Greece, to the Caribbean a couple of times; I was in India and Southeast Asia. I took a year off work and traveled. I bought a condo; I sold a condo. I moved to the west coast. It goes on and on and on. And it has been wonderful, and if all that hadn't happened, I wouldn't have gotten to that wonderfulness. So I guess that's where the wisdom comes into play, is how do we know what this is all about? How do we know it's not all perfect the way it is, you know.

My daughter is now trying to live in a way that is more true as much as possible and with the granddaughter, but it's funny, she's now in a place where she is taking on the shame and the guilt of not having a man in the house for her daughter. . . .Yet she knows how her father was, how verbally abusive he was. They love their father very much but she saw that. She knows what she is capable of; she doesn't know she is the same as I was, but this thing is so big . . . this is still going on. . . .You see the shows on TV, she goes to kindergym at the Y. The fathers are there . . . she is there on her own with her daughter. If fathers care, she gets all melodramatic about it and upset about it. When does that cycle stop?

Realizing the Responsibility

Catherine learned from her own mother that mothering and providing for a family involved responsibility. She took it on in a way that became problematic for her. Subsequently, her sense of responsibility has changed.

Catherine: I mean when Karen was born, oh, I remember that, I don't know where I was but I certainly didn't think I was bearing a child because I found that the most overwhelming experience, to think that I was to be responsible for this child. It was truly overwhelming. My blood pressure was out of control and they couldn't get it back under control and nobody could understand, because it was such an experience for me to have a baby. I mean, I don't know what I thought I was doing the 9 months, but certainly I didn't think it was going to be that. I had

no idea. And yet I did at some level. But I had no idea how much I would take that responsibility on.

Like that was—oh, my God—more so with the first one than with the second one. With the second one I guess I felt, you know, I'd lived through that first one. I mean I sleepwalked, it was like I was stressed out because of this baby because it was such a big deal. I didn't really truly enjoy the experience, you know. I enjoyed her at a certain level, but not truly, not the way I enjoy my granddaughter.

Rita: I'm curious about that. Was it in terms of wanting to do it right? Were you worried that you wouldn't do it right? Mother right?

Yeah, I think so because I was told I was wrong all my life, from things at home so that was still there, so would I do it right? And I also feel like I didn't have a mother who was really a mother, someone who gave love and took care of me in that way so I didn't know what to do. Not that I could speak that, because if I could speak that I would have said, "What the hell do you do?" But I couldn't speak that, I didn't have those feelings. I had feelings of love, but I was so overwhelmed by my feelings of responsibility of having this child. And I was definitely a good leader with my children and gave them a lot of love. And I also controlled their lives.

. . . Our value system was that we were to be good, loving parents and we were both very responsible people, so because of that we made sure that we were responsible in their lives. Now, who they are, they haven't a bloody clue and they are starting to work on it now because of us being so responsible, because we made them into what we wanted to be, I believe. They are not—well, they are people now. They are starting to be who they want to be, which is quite wonderful. And I'll be glad when they get there. But that's what we did to them, so there is a lot of stuff that has been done. But it wasn't done—if I had to do this all over again, it would sure be, it would sure be different now, if I had all this knowledge then.

. . . So I spent my whole life doing it and then finally when I got to be, when my marriage broke up, I finally collapsed and was devastated by the whole thing. And then I had the car accident. And I remember looking at them and thinking, "Why can't you fix me? You know, like I fixed you all for so long, like where are you for me?" It was probably the hardest thing that I had ever gone through in my whole life to see—Oh my God, I have to do this myself and no one else is going to do it for me. I had always done everything myself and I couldn't understand why they couldn't do anything for me. And that's when I got that I shouldn't be helping them either. Everyone has to take their own journey and you

have to love and nurture and stand by, but you have to let them do their own work.

And since I've stopped fixing things, life has become fun, because I can now look at them and give them the love and support and it turns out better than the way I controlled it and they get the message. So the learning is much faster because they are learning for themselves. Sometimes it's difficult.

. . . I didn't want my daughter to have an abortion when she had made the decision. You see, this was the new me at this time and I knew who I was and I knew it was part of her journey for how it would work for her, and I knew I couldn't do anything about it. I knew I could only tell her what I knew and how I felt, but that she had to make that decision.

So that was hard for you?

Oh, it was really very hard because it was something I couldn't do. I had to let her go through it. I didn't want her to choose abortion but she did. She had the abortion and she got pregnant about a year later, I guess, and I thought, Oh, my God, not again, I'll have to face it again. But she chose to keep it the second time and I didn't know how it was going to work, but from my experience, I know that I would never do it again and that is only me, I don't judge anybody else by that, but that is for me from the wisdom I have now.

And that's where I'm trying to come from more and more and my oldest daughter is starting to come from there. . . . You know, the oldest one, she was president of the high school, a straight A student, did well at university, but got into the craziest, weirdest relationship that you'd ever want to imagine and ended up having a child. He is native and she is non-native and there are issues going on and on. And she planted herself in the middle of this mess and that's not what I would say if I was still controlling the situation—that would have never happened. And I know that. But she would have never known her heart either. She's got to find her heart. She lived 2 years on a reservation and she got to experience a lot, and yeah, she has had a lot of pain, but if I would have controlled, and I could have controlled that situation, if I had had a big enough fit, she knew I didn't care for him, so those were big steps for her to come out of this pattern. She has custody battles, all sorts of things facing her. She said to me the other night that she thinks she is being the rebellious teenager that she never was, that she is going through it now. Sometimes when she speaks, it doesn't even sound like her, but it is because she has to find out who she is.

The younger one isn't there yet. She's still controlling the world and attempts to control us. She does my job, she does what I did very well. I role-modeled for her and when I see her I think, oh, my God, I mean she doesn't allow me to forget the way I lived 45 years of my life. But something has to happen for her to get it and I don't know what that will have to be.

Redefining One's Self

For Catherine, at this stage in life after many years of following a role, it has become necessary to find and redefine herself. She talks about this reshaping of who she is as more than "just" a mother and a wife.

> I do a lot of work, a lot of personal growth work, but I find when you get back into that family unit it's like you haven't done any work, sometimes. So the journey is far from over. Now there is another stage for me as a mother, to truly be able to become my own being and not just be mother. It's great for mothers to let go of daughters, but there should be a book, about the trauma mothers go through breaking loose from daughters. You hear about daughters breaking away from mothers, but there should be a book the other way.
>
> You know I saw it when we were in Long Beach, as a family, one daughter said something to the other and right away she says, "Mom, tell her not to say that." Just a second, we are all adults. There is a granddaughter here. You know it is so automatic that they go back into the old patterns, and I don't do this job anymore. But everyone just falls back into it. That's why when I came back from Long Beach, I booked a trip to Hawaii for Christmas because I haven't been with my former husband since 1990, but he still comes here every year. Every Christmas he comes, and we have Christmas. You know it is a fantasy, we are not a family, per se, yes we have our children, yet every year, I do the turkey, I do all

the cooking, and they all sit down and have this wonderful meal. And it isn't true. It's like there is a lie there. But the person who has kept that lie going is me, from doing all the bloody work.

They can't say anything, they would like to say a lot, but they can't. Because one was going to elope and wanted me to buy into it by not having any issues around it or feelings, so how could she say, "Mom, you can't go away at Christmas." And the other one has said, "Mom, you do have a life," and she is trying desperately to get out of this sort of enmeshment to be individuals, and then the ex-husband, I don't know how he is going to fit in. Because I felt guilty when the marriage broke up, I promised him we would always be a family and I worked diligently to keep a relationship with my ex-husband so that the girls would always have that. So we had to get along for their sake. And I gave up a lot to do that. I guess we both did. So it will be interesting to see how the journey unfolds at Christmas time. I understand there is a full moon on Christmas Eve, and I am a real moonchild, so I probably will have tears, but I'll get over it.

We had a fight a couple of weeks ago, so we had a family circle. We sat in a circle and discussed, and we actually had a talking stick and didn't interrupt each other and attempted to try to listen, and we had a mediator and we tried desperately to come to some consensus. So we do try and that is beautiful, because I have two girls who will do that and not a lot of people have that.

Everybody is committed to this family. We all have issues, and there is a lot of work, but everyone wants to make it work.

Beth's Story

Beth identified "Adjusting to Separation and Divorce" as an important event that marked her daughter's adolescence. Both Beth and her daughter had to face the adjustment. "Feeling Guilty" was another theme that Beth felt strongly throughout this time.

Adjusting to Separation and Divorce

Beth: I was married at 17 and I had Amber at 24. She is 18, turning 19 in January. So I was married for 7 years before I had her. I wasn't expecting her, didn't plan to get pregnant. I had two IUD babies. Surprise. And I was really thrilled when I found out I was pregnant. I had a really wonderful pregnancy. I was doing yoga and riding my bike until I had her, you know, fit and healthy. I had a long, long and difficult labor but I was really glad she was a girl. I wasn't out loud about wanting a girl, but in my heart I knew that I did. I would have adjusted if it was a boy, I'm sure, but I was happy and my second was a boy.

We lived in the country until she was in grade 3 and that's when we moved into town. So we had a pretty good environment. I always worked and I was going to school. It was a pretty opportune time. Then when she was about 13, that's

when the marriage wasn't working. I guess it probably hadn't been working for a long time before that—I mean it was "fine." You can put that in quotation marks. It was practical, everything worked okay. He did his thing, I did mine. But as I was in my graduate program and towards the end of my undergraduate program, I guess a lot of the learning to be introspective, looking at my beliefs and values, to facilitate making contact with others from an emotional place. And that really brought it home to me to realize that I wasn't living that at home with my husband.

At about the same time that it was becoming really clear that I needed to separate, I was diagnosed with Lupus. To me it felt like a life and death situation. For some people the illness can have devastating effects. When I looked at my life, at my marriage, I knew I wasn't being experienced as myself, I wasn't my true self, and that came from my experience in my family of origin. So was I willing to continue living this half of a life or did I want to live my life before I died? It wasn't an easy decision. I mean I think that families should try to work things out, especially for the kids. But I didn't think that it could work for me. So back to the guilt. Feeling guilty if I stayed and feeling guilty if I left. It was a despairing time through the decision-making and then making it happen. I had huge assistance and support by going into therapy. What also happened was that I learned about separating my experience from Amber's experience. I learned how to help her handle the difficulties she was having and also how to deal with my own, but in a

separate context. Once I started to unlock everything I had been sitting on—I was married for 20 years—and then to look at what it meant for me growing up in the family that I grew up in, it was complicated enough to deal with the divorce, but then also all of the family of origin stuff that I had experienced, it wasn't easy.

. . . So when Amber was 13 the marriage was dissolving. And it wasn't really talked about very freely. I mean it was a little bit, from an abstract place. You know we acknowledged that it was happening, but in a pretty abstract way, like, "It isn't about you, it's about Dad and I." But I was pretty vague about what was going on because I didn't want to leave her with a negative impression of her dad. So I was really conscious of her. I kind of wanted to protect her. I got really confused about how to do it well and I went to counselling and tried to find out how best to be there for her. It was solid support. The more I could talk it out, the better it was for me. And Amber.

First we made it really clear that we were separating and that we would be living in different houses. She didn't have much of a reaction to it; she seemed to accept it, outwardly. In my company she was able to separate those things out, in my company. Although she wouldn't stay overnight at her father's. She felt anxious around him. He was really distraught that I left him. He cried a lot, couldn't work, had some substance abuse issues.

. . . We agreed that it was best for the kids to have both parents. We both wanted to be involved in the parenting. We did the sharing, where she went to her dad's for every second week, then came back here. It wasn't easy for her. It was hard stuff for us to talk about. Every time she went over to her dad's she had to take lots of things with her. It was almost like moving each time, we practically needed a van. Each time after she left I felt really heart-wrenching loss.

When we tried a couple of weeks alternating she didn't like it. She would get cranky. One incident that I remember stands out. She had her own phone. So I would get two bills, both in my name, but one was for her and she would always open both bills because she wanted to be fully responsible for her own phone. I would give her some family allowance and she could pay for and buy things she needed. I guess this is when she was moving back and forth and she was getting more and more irritable and cranky and argumentative. She just took up so much space all the time, but still didn't talk about the anger she was feeling. So I started talking about how we really needed to work together around here to make things work around the house, like helping to make dinner and cleaning up after, doing chores, that kind of thing, without being asked. And she wouldn't.

And she was angry about being asked. She was busy you know—doing her thing. So I said, "Well, I don't feel good about giving you your family allowance when you are being pissy around me, it just didn't feel right." So fine then. So I

didn't give it to her, but I gave her tons of ways she could earn some money, like sweep the floor for 10 bucks. But she wouldn't. She dug her heels in and I dug mine in. So I asked her how she was managing with her phone bill and she said, "Well, she wouldn't be having a problem if I just gave her the money."

A few months went by and she mentioned that she was behind on her bill so I asked her how much. She said,"I don't know." I said,"Well, guess." She said, "Oh, about 50 bucks." So it was just before Christmas. She just got her social insurance number, she was showing all this new mature behavior, so I thought for a Christmas present I would just write a cheque to BC Tel to give her a fresh start. It wasn't easy for her without a job to make money, maybe it was my guilt, but it didn't seem like it at the time. So anyway I phoned BC Tel, I was going to make out the cheque and wrap it up in a whole bunch of boxes, and I phoned and the bill was $1495.00! So what I did was I hung up the phone. Then I phoned right back and said, "There must be some kind of mistake." It can't be, you know, she's trustworthy, responsible, you know, all this kind of stuff.

So she came home and I said," I need to talk to you." And she said, "Oh, yeah, what about?" and she had her hand on the phone, she's about to make a call. I said, "I think we need some privacy." She said, "What, what is it?" So we went into the living room. And I said, "It's about the phone bill." And her face turned all white and she said, "I've been meaning to tell you about that."

> And explained to me how it happened, and I wasn't angry. I was confused and I was disappointed that she hadn't come and talked to me about it, because she had let a friend use it from school and she would talk for a long time. Her friend had a job and would pay bits and pieces of it and Amber was saying, "I can't keep doing this." Her friend would say, "Oh, I'll give you $300 when I get paid." When I saw these payments on her bill, it scared me. Like how is she making $300 payments? So I asked her how. She cried. Once we slowed everything down and took a look at all the complexities of the situation, we sorted out a lot. It was a serious discussion, had a lot of layers to it, but the biggest impact was that we connected despite the intensity of emotion. Now that she's on her own, in her own place and coping with a low-paying job, I find that I'm in there every month "helping." It's such a tough balance—making room for her to learn from her experience and supporting her through it.

Feeling Guilty

Beth identified "Feeling Guilty" as a theme herself. In selecting the narrative themes from the stories I also found it to be a useful theme in Beth's narrative.

> I think one of the most powerful and difficult themes—I'm not sure if it is a direct feeling—is to feel or not feel super guilty that she had to go through that [my divorce] at her age, just starting high school. She is such a really neat person, with so much on the ball, and she started to have trouble in school. She was a brilliant

student, really bright, creative, inquisitive mind, and always had been. And I took it on, I thought it was my fault. And of course her dad thought so too. He was helping me to feel that way and I think it is thematic. When something is troublesome and I'm anywhere near it, then somehow it's my fault.

I think that contributed to my being, um, the word that comes to mind is slack or lenient. Of course there was a lack of structure anyway, and she was always very trustworthy. We've always had a high level of mutual respect and maybe that's good, maybe it's not but we've never had tense conflict in our relationship. Things got talked about. But I guess the catering to her—

. . . In retrospect Amber seemed to show an ease with the change, but underneath she was struggling. Outwardly she was outgoing, easy-going. I can see now that she probably wanted to go along with my excitement and minimize her own distress. I think that's what I was modeling. She had seen me do that, go with the feeling that I was expected to show, while covering up what I was really feeling. She was going with the flow but not talking about what she was really experiencing.

It was a year or so before John came on the scene. And although I was at school and studying, I tried to be really mindful of how it would be for them. John started spending more time here. But she was quite responsive to him. I was more or less on my own for about a year, then he was here more and eventually started

spending the night. . . . [M]y perception was that she had questions about sexuality and relationships. And of course I was in the throes again of just having fallen in love again myself. At this point she was 14 or 14 1/2. . . . Well, it was about this time that I found a note. And I know you don't read kids' notes, but it was on the driveway, in the rain, open. And I thought, hmm, I can't resist. I feel a bit embarrassed for having read it, but I did. And it was her talking to a friend about making decisions about being sexual with her boyfriend, about how she had felt pressured and how she had a lot of regrets, so she encouraged her friend to take her time. I was upset by the tone of letter, thinking that she had been pressured and been sexual when she didn't want to be. So I brought it up, that I had found this note, opened, in the driveway. She was scared. She said she wasn't referring to herself. I just went with that.

It was really good, but it really brought to my mind that I was busy thinking about myself and my new relationship when in fact it, in quotation marks, should have been her time.

Rita: And what was that about—that it "should have been her time"?

Well, it seemed to me that that's a transition time in your life and the focus should have been on her—that it was her sexuality that should have been getting the attention, but for me, it was mine. And that probably was a part of another contributing factor that she had when she wasn't telling me what was going on.

Then we started to get more open about those kinds of conversations with the woman who lived here and her son, and by their company here it felt more comfortable to talk more openly. A friend's girlfriend got pregnant so that gave another opportunity to talk it again. And Amber was doing lots of "Counter Attack" and leadership kinds of things at school. Making those kinds of decisions. It seemed like it almost took a crisis before we started talking about these things, but to do it without making her feel boxed in, to respect her privacy, was important for me.

. . . I started thinking about when I was her age. I think some of my fear came from how I didn't have a lot of connection with my body at that time.

. . . My mother was physically disabled. She had crippling arthritis. She was in a wheelchair from about the time I was 5. When I was born, she had to put me in a cloth diaper and bite it with her teeth, then crawl upstairs to carry me. She had terrible, agonizing pain, and long stretches in the hospital. I lived with my mother's pain, I was very aware of what helped and what made it worse. My father was in the military, so he was gone a lot. I found myself in the role of keeping everything running smoothly, keeping everyone in the family happy. I got lots of points for being the nurse, her little helper. Even at the age of 5, I remember handling things, calling the ambulance, making arrangements for someone to look after my brothers and I. I needed to handle things because if a stressful situation

happened it could increase her pain level and exacerbate a crisis situation. And I knew what that entailed.

I remember one time when my brother was playing football and broke his nose. I remember handling it so that my mom wouldn't even know it had happened. I remember getting out the ice, wiping up all the blood, cleaning up the mess so that my mother wouldn't be upset by it. I covered for them. I covered it all up as if it didn't even happen. I was 11.

Where were you in your family?

I had two older brothers and one older sister.

And how did you get this role, as the youngest?

Well, I watched my older sister be the rebel. She would be pesky, outspoken, lippy. And I saw what happened to her. Her consequence was that she got sent away to Catholic boarding school. So that wasn't an option. My oldest brother could do no wrong. In their eyes he was perfect. But he really was abusive and mean-spirited and quite controlling, but in their eyes, he was perfect. The middle brother was weak and frail and sensitive, kind of nerdy, and there wasn't room for anyone else in our family to be sick.

. . . I remember my mother telling me, "If I die within 5 years it will be your fault." That was if I ever didn't make the mark, if I was seen holding my boyfriend's hand or if I had done something that might not be right as seen

through the neighbors' eyes. I ran away once because of it when I was 15, because I was so afraid. If she died I knew my brother, the mean-spirited one, would be in charge. I never wanted that to happen.

. . . So ever since I can remember, I felt bad about being born, so that is one major thing I wanted to do differently and I always celebrate tremendously with my kids, any special event or accomplishment.

Rita's Story

I am not the mother of an adolescent daughter and this is not my mother's story. I am including my own story, however, because it is essential to this study.

I have been interested in the topic of mother-daughter relationships for many years. My own experience as an adolescent was harsh. I tend to agree with Anne Pipher, the author of Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls (1994), who believes that adolescent girls in our North American society face many dangers and that the traumas or life lessons that adolescent girls commonly experience are forgotten and minimized as girls are socialized to be women.

I did not feel a close connection with my mother at adolescence—though I would not say we had a lot of conflict or that I felt any pronounced type of separation at the time of adolescence. I just felt that I lived in a very different world from both of my parents.

My parents and their parents were born in Romania. After the Second World War they narrowly escaped Communist Europe and immigrated to Canada. At the age of 27, my mother had already experienced many losses: the death of her first child, the loss of her home and country, and then separation from her mother and entire family who remained in communist Germany. After immigrating to Canada in 1950, my parents were indentured immigrants in a farming community in central Alberta.

As the middle sibling of five, I am the oldest daughter, with one sister, who is 13 months younger. I remember moving to our own farm at 5 years of age. It was the same year I started school and learned to speak English. My sister, youngest brother and I had a very close relationship growing up, and the bond I had with them, I believe, replaced that type of closeness with my mother, who worked along side my father on our farm.

The work she did and the talents she has are something that I have since come to appreciate as very creative. She could produce most everything that we needed as a family from what we had on our farm—from homemade butter and cheeses, to wool and eiderdown bedding quilts and pillows, to homemade soaps and detergents. She gardened, canned, preserved, knit, spun, dyed, wove, and much more. The work ethic was deeply engrained—there was no time for summer vacations or "quality" family time as I would define it today. Even as a child, I knew and felt the financial pressures of farming.

At the same time, I felt as if I lived in a different world from my parents and paternal grandparents, who had also immigrated. Going to school in the nearest town,

speaking English, and living in another culture, I did not think my mother understood me and probably she did not. Her experience as a girl growing up in Romania in the 1930s was very different from mine.

At 15, I was raped. It resulted in a pregnancy and I had an abortion. I felt that these events were almost as traumatic for my mother as they were for me. However, we did not talk about any of the experience and my mother did not know that I had been raped.

In 1978, when I was 18 years old, I started university and became a volunteer counsellor for Planned Parenthood International, an organization that teaches about and communicates healthy sexuality. In my role as a counsellor and later as the counselling director for the agency, I saw many cases where mothers and their adolescent daughters struggled with sexuality issues and decision-making for unplanned pregnancies.

In 1982 I began my M.A. in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia, specializing in the counselling of girls and women. Studying developmental psychology, I recognized deficiencies in the theories, especially where female development was concerned. I welcomed the feminist counselling models and researched the factors that facilitate strong and healthy relationships between women, particularly strong relationships between sisters.

This study about mother-daughter relationships is another step in my exploration of women's experience in relationships, including my own. In 1992, during my Ph.D.

program, I attended a workshop for therapists on mother-daughter relationships given by Drs. Rosemary Liburd and Maria Eriksen which had a significant impact on me. I felt that I understood much more as a result of it about this relationship than I had previously, and that I had something to say about my own relationship with my mother and about my experience as a new mother.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

Creating a narrative is a collaborative process. Each woman told me her story of mothering her adolescent daughter(s) knowing that her story, or parts of it, would be retold in the form of my dissertation. My decision to format these stories around narrative themes was made so that as much of each story as possible could remain in its original context. I wanted their voices and their perspectives to be heard. The narrative theme titles were selected from their stories using the mothers' own words and supported by their accounts of their experience. This section presents a discussion of each narrative theme. Initially it is shown in its original version in the context of our conversation. Then exerpts from the other women's conversations that relate to that theme are drawn together and discussed. I am also invested in this study, and although I am not the mother of an adolescent daughter, I identify with some of these themes as a daughter and as a mother, but of a young son.

Theme One: Being Worth It

This theme originated in the following segment of Jane's conversation:

> I wore hand-me-downs because my sister was older than I was. I wore hand-me-downs for years. . . . So there was this theme, "Oh, it's good enough for you" and I think it was important . . . in my own feeling that I wasn't important enough to

> be, to think of me first. . . . I had always put my husband first, the children first, and put me last. And I think there was a theme there with my mother in looking back, and with my mother's sister, that second-hand stuff and second-rate stuff was good enough for the kids. And where that is of material goods, it still has an effect . . . in that they are second rate and not really important enough and I tried to reverse that. . . . I don't know if the jury is in on that one, whether I have succeeded, but I hear them with more awareness than I ever had. I hear them taking time for themselves, I hear them choosing something that is really good because they have enough feeling of self worth to do that, rather than to do that for someone else and I think that is a good thing because then they will survive.

The theme of "Being Worth It" seems to address Jane's realization that as a mother she had "put herself last." She hypothesizes that her feeling of "not being important enough" was instilled by the attitude of her mother and aunt. Taking care of the needs of one's children before one's own needs, putting one's self last and being self-less are characteristics of many mothers, especially of the past generation. This attitude often begins by trying to meet the needs of an infant. I remember my own early experience of caring for my own new baby. Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, I soon realized that I needed to take care of myself in order to better care for my son and to appreciate and enjoy the experience. For many women, lacking resources, and physical and emotional support, as well as believing that they need to take on all of the responsibility for parenting, leaves little time and energy to even consider their own needs.

Jane also relates this feeling of "not being important enough" to low self-esteem. Self-esteem, as defined in Women and Self-Esteem (Sanford & Donovan, 1985), is the measure of how much we like and approve of ourselves, including the beliefs and images we have and hold to be true of ourselves. Each of the other mothers in this study also mentioned the self-esteem level in their adolescent daughters. All seemed to be well aware of the benefits of positive self-esteem at this crucial age. The following excerpts illustrate this well.

> Catherine: As they were growing up I thought they did [have good self-esteem], but they don't. I thought they did, but I thought I did too and I didn't. It's stuff you have to work on. . . . So to the outside world, people would say they have a lot of self-esteem, but I don't think they do. They have false self-esteem, based on out-there things, it's not based on what's in here. . . . I think that's how you get into relationships that are all screwed up. You know, the oldest one, she was president of the high school, a straight A student, did well at university, but got into the craziest, weirdest relationship that you'd ever want to imagine and ended up having a child.
>
> Blythe: I questioned myself sometimes . . ."Will she grow up with insecurities?" because she seemed to be insecure. She sucked her thumb for about 10 years and I used to worry about that and I used to think that maybe inside she is a seething heap of insecurities because her dad left and because I always had to work.

Some of the mothers talked about self-esteem in relation to body image. This is a link that has been made in the literature (Steiner-Adair, 1990) and one that seems much more relevant to adolescent girls than to adolescent boys (Bar-Tal & Sax, 1976; Wooley & Wooley, 1980).

> Nikohl: It hurts me to hear them talk. . . . They look at their bodies and find them ugly. And it hurts, it hurts terribly. My sons, my sons don't have the same problem with their body images like my daughters have. They're taking it like boys and men, they age, they grow, they are okay. The impact society has created for girls is different. It's hard for girls—especially the young one. She's a model so that's hard, very hard. For her to have a strong identity, a strong body image of who she is, is crucial, to be able to move in those circles and to be connected to herself and who she is and not wait for the outside to give her her worth. She is mature in everything, still she has made choices in life that allow her to be—being vegan, it is very easy for her to be svelte. . . . And Jennifer, whose body is still very good, she works harder at it because she has more, she deals with her life differently and she feels in her own way. Her body image fluctuates as much as everything else.
>
> Catherine: They were both very slim when they were growing up, they were always in shape because they were involved in sports. . . . They had friends who were anorexic and into some severe trouble growing up. Image is very important to

the younger one. The older one had a very beautiful body when she was younger but she always saw herself as fat. I had some pictures here to show her and she said, "I always thought I was fat." She is a tall girl, she's 5'10" so because she was always bigger than everyone else, I guess she felt bigger.

Beth: She gained weight. That started a little before and may have been a reflection of the relationship [breakup]. I tried to stay away from focusing on it too much because I was afraid of contributing to an eating disorder. . . . I started thinking about when I was her age. I think some of my fear came from how I didn't have lot of connection with my body at that time. . . . Sometimes I wonder if as a mother, some of the things that I have struggled with that I have never really communicated with Amber about, if she hasn't just picked it up anyway, some of that undercurrent of my hiding myself sometimes. Maybe her knowing at some level has to do with her weight problem.

For each of these mothers, positive self-esteem in their daughters was reflected in their daughters' abilities and attitudes. For Jane, positive self-worth fostered creativity; for Nikohl, strong body image and internalized self-worth seemed crucial to move in the modeling circles where her daughter would be evaluated. For Blythe, it had to do with security and healthy adjustment as an adult, and for Catherine, positive self-esteem related to having the ability to sustain healthy relationships. For Beth, there was a direct connection between self-esteem, body image and eating disorders.

These mothers seemed aware of the costs of negative self-image problems in their daughters. Some also expressed a sense of guilt or responsibility if their daughters showed problems that could be attributed to low levels of self-esteem. Beth is a good example. She had the belief that by focusing on Amber's weight she might contribute to an eating disorder. Mothers, in fact, have been held responsible in the theoretical literature for contributing to their daughters' low levels of self-esteem (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983; Flax, 1978), to their inabilities to have healthy adult relationships (Bowlby, 1969), and to their eating disorders (Wooley & Wooley, 1980), which are seen as problems related to low self-esteem.

Theme Two: Being Prepared for the World

This theme also derived from Jane's story. "I felt that I would have had more self-confidence had I been more prepared for the world. And then I prepared them for the world and wondered why they didn't have more self-confidence."

For the mothers (Jane, Blythe, and Catherine) who talked about "preparing" their daughters for the world, there seemed to be an implicit comparison between their own experiences and those of their daughters. For Jane, this meant helping her daughters to be more "in the know" in terms of culture, music, and the arts. For Blythe and for Catherine, this value was strongly emphasized by giving their daughters more sexual knowledge and preparedness.

Blythe: I wanted her to be a better survivor. My parents did protect me, but I don't always believe that that is the best thing. And kids do have to go out and learn about life, not that they should necessarily learn the hard way, but you can't always protect them.

Catherine: The oldest daughter knows about my abortion because she had an abortion herself. And she knew about my abortion before [she had hers]. I always wanted them both to know everything so that if it ever happened to them it would be their choice. If they knew that these things could happen to me, they would know it would be okay to come to me. I didn't want them to have that fear of being totally out there alone. That was my form of protecting them.

Jane, Blythe, and Catherine are intensely aware of how their lack of knowledge affected their own lives. They are also aware that their daughters could be vulnerable to the same harsh experiences (i.e., low self-esteem, unplanned pregnancy, abortion) and that more knowledge could help to protect and prepare them. What is interesting about this theme is that these women also alluded to how their mothers had also wanted to protect them.

Jane: I think I tried to do the best that I could with the awareness that I had at the time and I'm sure my parents did the same. . . . She left school because at the time, in the Depression era, there seemed to be no future in schooling. Of course she

regretted this later and always encouraged my sister and me to get a good education.

Blythe: And my mom, all she wanted was for me to get married, because that is what she had done, and my parents were worried about that and they thought that somehow all they needed to do was to encourage me to get married. . . . and I was really determined to go and do what I wanted to do. They were probably really worried about me thinking, "Oh, she'll never make it." They thought I needed protection, but I wasn't interested in getting married, which probably would have had a really safe and secure life, but I just wasn't interested.

What seems important with this theme is that these women are aware that their mothers also wanted to protect them when they were growing up. Their mothers acted on what they knew or had experienced. After Jane's mother had experienced the Depression of the 1930s and given up her own education, she recognized that for her own daughters—Jane and her sister—education was of value. The contextual differences surrounding the lives of mother and daughter from one generation to the next made it difficult for mothers to truly know what would best prepare their daughters for the future. I recognize that I also felt unprepared for dealing with my world as an adolescent and I knew from early on that my parents did not understand and could not know how to better prepare me.

Theme Three: Creating a Home

Providing a good home or environment was also something that each mother talked about or alluded to in one way or another. In many ways, creating and providing a home is the setting in which one mothers. The theme originated in Nikohl's story. She talked about her early childhood experience and how her idea of a home was different from what she had experienced: "I was raised in a home without love. I was raised in a home that had food and clothing, but there was no communication, no talking about emotions, nothing. Well—I was not going to have a home like this." The other mothers also talked about qualities of a good environment or a good home in their conversations.

> Blythe: We always lived in good neighborhoods because I thought that was really important, that we lived someplace that was always decent, where she could meet kids and go to school right there and feel secure.

> Jane: My oldest daughter almost moved to Portland with me [where I was going to school], which wouldn't have been good because the kind of environment that she could have had for school where I was living would have been very poor. She would have been unhappy. It was a really tough American neighborhood with many, many hours alone. It wouldn't have been very good. . . . I had really modest digs, you know, student accommodation. . . . I think she had a much richer environment [where she was].

Catherine: Our family was like the role model family. . . . Our value system was that we were to be good, loving parents and we were both very responsible people, so because of that we made sure that we were responsible in their lives. . . We had an active life and we had very good jobs so we had a good life. We did a lot. The kids did a lot, we travelled a lot so we were never bored . . . they were very fortunate.

Beth: We lived in the country until she was in grade 3 and that's when we moved into town. So we had a pretty good environment. I always worked and I was going to school. It was a pretty opportune time.

Nikohl's description of a good home involved: being one's self, feeling comfortable, communicating openly and working out conflict. Some of the mothers (Jane, Blythe, Beth) alluded to the physical environment that made a particular place desirable to live in, such as having good schools and good neighborhoods where their girls could play and make friends. Another element of a good home had to do with financial means. Jane, Catherine, and Beth mention a connection between their employment status and therefore their ability or inability to provide a good home. Income clearly affects a family's choice of housing, schools, recreation, diet, clothing and much more. When trying to provide the best opportunities for one's family, money matters and it is extremely stressful when income severely limits one's options. Clearly, this third theme

identifies that more than just functional and instrumental issues are important when trying to create a good home.

Theme Four: Mothering Differently

The theme "Mothering Differently" also came from Nikohl's story:

> Nikohl: When I had my diagnosis with ALS, I started changing. . . . Different things became important and I looked at my mother's mothering. . . . So my mothering was not at all based on her.
>
> *Rita: In opposition? or just—*
>
> Um, I was not going to raise my kids . . . My mother is not the kind of mother I'd like her to be. She's not the kind of grandmother I would like her to be. . . . So I am—so is it in reaction of her, I'm sure, yup. It's not getting back at her, just doing it differently.

Much has been written in the literature about girls and women not wanting to be like their own mothers. In this study it is particularly Nikohl, Beth and Catherine who decided to mother their children differently from how their mothers did due to painful experiences in their own mother-daughter relationships. For each of these women, there is a sense that they did not feel adequately mothered when they were children: Beth, because of her mother's severe illness, Catherine and Nikohl, due to their mothers' unhappy lives and overwhelming demands and responsibilities. As a result, these women

expressed the desire to mother differently from their mothers and to give more to their daughters than they had received in the context of the mother-daughter relationship.

> Beth: So ever since I can remember, I felt bad about being born so that is one major thing I wanted to do differently and I always celebrate tremendously with my kids, any special event or accomplishment.

> Catherine: But my mother was never really there for me because she was so busy working and so busy in this unhappy marriage. . . . I did not have . . . protection, I was out there by myself. I brought myself up basically.

Blythe and Jane also talked about doing something different in their mothering; however, these women seemed to be more satisfied with the nurturing they received. What they seem to have wanted was more specific and appropriate help in dealing with their worlds, worlds that their mothers had not experienced.

> Blythe: My mother was a great role model as far as mothering goes because she was a great mother. I often thought about what a wonderful life she provided for me and my brother. She was really loving and kind. She made my growing up very special. My dad contributed too. I sometimes call it magical. I was very protected and very loved, I was very lucky. . . . I sometimes think Sara didn't have it that good, she didn't have it that easy, she had to learn life harder and quicker than I did. I had a buffer that she didn't have. . . . I wanted Sara to be a better survivor. My parents did protect me, but I don't always believe that that is the best thing.

> And kids do have to go out and learn about life, not that they should necessarily learn the hard way, but you can't always protect them. . . .
>
> Jane: I tried to reverse that—without going overboard and providing them with incredible things, but I stressed quality and made it an important event in getting the child something good, that it was good quality and that they were worth it. They didn't have a lot of stuff, but what they did have was fairly good quality and I tried to say that they were important enough to have this. . . .

The women in this study, including myself, see themselves as different from their mothers and they aimed to mother differently from the outset, primarily to compensate for needs that their mothers had missed. At the same time they also conveyed an understanding of their mothers' lives, and provided explanations for why their mothers could not meet their needs, such as the heavy demands in their lives or the lack of knowledge as to what was appropriate.

Adrienne Rich (1976) notes that, "few women growing up in patriarchal society can feel mothered enough; the power of our mothers, whatever their love for us and their struggle on our behalf, is too restricted" (p. 243). Nice (1992) elaborates on this:

> The "loss" of the mother can be felt in many ways. Mother may have, following the child-rearing fashion of the times, put her child out to a wet nurse; fed her on a rigid schedule; or not held her often enough. She may have taught her to be a "good girl" and in so doing restricted her movements and her spirit. She may have been

> too concerned with the needs of others, particularly those of father and brothers, to offer her daughter the care she needed. She may have been trapped into employment which kept her away from her daughter, or worked so hard at ensuring the physical survival of her children that she had no time to show them affection. . . . a mother may not offer her daughter the role model of an assertive independent woman which she needs and this may be felt as another "loss."
>
> (p. 103)

Theme Five: Feeling Loss and Appreciation

All the mothers in this study identified feeling loss related to some aspect of her relationship with her daughter(s). This theme originated in Nikohl's story. Her death in the fall of 1996 highlighted this theme for me. Her beautiful and eloquent testament seems to capture some of the anticipatory loss for this mother diagnosed with a terminal illness. Hearing her speak during our conversations gave me the sense of how much she appreciated the experience of mothering her daughters (and her sons). In the following excerpt she talks of her feelings of loss, not related to her impending death, but of her daughters leaving home and travelling abroad.

> Nikohl: My daughter, my youngest one is leaving, and she's leaving for a year. . . I'm starting to feel already that she'll be gone. And, for the past year or so I have known that and I've known that the other daughter is leaving also in a year, so it's like my identity—who I am. . . . I'm going to be left with a big hole of time to do

> and time to think—they won't be there any more. . . . I'm not looking forward to it. I like being in their life. I like them being in my life. And I'm not looking forward to that at all. It's too short—I thought I was in for at least 50 years. I find 18 and 20 years is too short. Definitely. I didn't think like that when they were younger. When they were all around 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, I thought, when is it going to end? But now, since they've been teenagers, I'm kind of sad that that part is over. I know something else is coming, but I'm sad.

For the other mothers, loss was not so closely mingled with the appreciation of mothering and of her children. Appreciation is discussed, but in other contexts, as is shown in Jane's two separate comments.

> Jane: Maybe I'm still reclaiming the years when I wasn't there. Maybe there is some of that.

> Jane: And when I see her play, she plays from her center, right from the center of her being . . . It gives me unspeakable thrills to hear her play.

For Jane, the decision to pursue further education while her daughters were adolescents still arouses mixed feelings of loss, pain, and guilt 10 years later, even though, at the time, she had the sense that she "should" step back.

For Beth, loss was associated with joint custody parenting. For Blythe, there was a loss in closeness as her adolescent daughter chose to spend more time with her own friends—something that Blythe recognized as "normal" behavior. And Catherine talked

about feeling the loss in moving away from her young adult daughters, then the "honor" when they made the independent decisions to move to the city to which she had previously moved.

> Beth: Each time after she left [to her father's], I felt really heart-wrenching loss.
>
> Blythe: [S]ometimes I felt a little sad that she didn't want to go out with me anymore. But I rationalized it. I thought this is a pretty normal part of adolescence. I think most parents experience that.
>
> Catherine: I left Ottawa because I wanted to move to the west coast . . .[Now] they are both here . . . they came to where I was. That's quite an honor, that they would choose to live where I live.

For each of these mothers, feelings of loss after separation or in the preparation for separation were felt. The women recognized that a physical moving away from each other was inevitable and they expressed mixed feelings about this prospect. I did not specifically ask about their "separation" processes and the women did not talk about heightened conflict leading into their separations. It did seem to me, however, that these mothers were aware of the social messages that say separation between mother and daughters is necessary and positive for the relationship. Frequently, the mothers themselves initiated the separation process. I wondered if some of the mixed feeling of loss, pain, and guilt arose for these women when they acted on theoretical prescriptions that may have contradicted their own mothering instincts.

Theme Six: Communicating about Sex

Communicating about sex and issues of sexuality was another theme that each mother talked about. For Blythe, where this theme originated, it was pronounced:

> When I became pregnant with Sara, it wasn't planned. I wasn't married and it happened partly because I was naive. . . . I remember my parents saying to me years and years later that they wished that they had told me more and talked about important things like this and wished that they had made it easier for me to ask questions because that wasn't done. So when Sara was growing up I thought if there is one thing I am going to do is ensure that she knows. I'm not going to hide it from her. I'm going to be as honest and straightforward with her as I can. I thought it was really important to do that. And to this day—she is 23 now—we still talk very openly.

For each of the other mothers this was also a subject that was handled with a marked difference from how their own mothers had handled it. Not only did the mothers in this study seem to talk frankly and openly about sexuality with their daughters, they also seemed aware of the sensitivity required to do so.

> Nikohl: When it comes in terms of talking about sex, it's not something that I sat them down and told them anything A to Z; it was continuous just like anything else. When Allison had her first sexual encounter she didn't tell me, she kept it silent as long as she could. I found out, but she did not talk about it. So I waited

until she talked to me about it and it took a few months. Teenagers need privacy and mystery and I know that so we didn't talk about it until she was ready. Jennifer was more open about this. I knew the next day. So it's like Jennifer's different than Allison. My kids knew the first time I had sex with my boyfriend. So I don't know—sexuality is such for me an ongoing topic.

Catherine: My brother was probably one of the biggest pains of my life. The one who is eight years older than me had done some sexual abuse with me, so I really didn't care about him too much and he was my mother's favorite, so that didn't help the situation. . . . I always wanted them both to know everything so that if it ever happened to them it would be their choice. If they knew that these things could happen to me they would know it would be okay to come to me. I didn't want them to have that fear of being totally out there alone. That was my form of protecting them. . . . And now my oldest daughter is saying, "Mom, I knew too much too young" and I think of that and I think, "Oh my God, what have I done to her?" and I get into my guilt and then I think, well, maybe a lot of other things would have happened to her if she hadn't known this, but she has no way of knowing that. And yet I didn't tell the younger one, and she says, "Why didn't you tell me?". . . But if I had to do that over again, I would do the same damn thing. That is something I wouldn't change. I mean I find that really funny and I find that statement that she makes even strange because things are so open now, and they talk about so much, all the abuse and all the other stuff, mind you, she is

26 now, but her daughter will be around when that stuff is talked about. I mean they're talking about that to children to teach them these things and yet because I did it, she said she learnt too much too fast. So it is quite interesting.

Beth: When Amber got her [first] period, we had a great discussion about it. It was a really important and special time. It reminded me of how different it was with my mother. My mother never talked a single word about sex, or sexuality. When I was in grade 10, I wrote a paper on sex, on birth control, and abortion. It was at that time that Thalidomide had been identified as causing birth defects. That's what was going on at the time. My mother was abhorred. She was just horrified. And at that same time my sister was pregnant at 17. Lots of my friends were sexually active. But my mother was adamant about it, "You don't talk about this subject. Case closed." My mother had never talked to me in any way about sex and I was determined to be more upfront with my daughter. . . . but to do it without making her feel boxed in, to respect her privacy was important to me.

With the massive changes that have occurred in women's ability to express their sexuality, between the past and present generation, is it any wonder that this is an extremely sensitive subject when it comes up between a mother and her daughter (Arcana, 1979). For as Catherine found, mothers are frequently criticized for what they do say. In the study titled, "Sexuality education: What daughters in their 30s wish their mothers had told them," Brock & Jennings (1993) found that of the 30 women sampled (born between

1951 and 1960), nearly all of the adult daughters believed their mothers provided an inadequate sexuality education. When their mothers were able to talk at all about sex, the talk consisted largely of negative warnings and rules. What most of the women wished for was not so much specific facts, but a particular approach to sexuality education, an approach that presented sexuality positively as "a normal, natural thing" (p. 64). An unexpected finding in their study was the extent to which these daughters (26 of 30) exonerated their mothers. They were aware that their mothers also had inadequate education, that they came from conservative family backgrounds, and that they may also have had a lack of sexual pleasure.

Communicating around issues of sexuality is difficult for many mothers, especially at this time in our history, when female sexual attitudes and conduct have changed dramatically over the past 30 years. In fact, according to Fillion (1996), the behavior of a young woman in the 1990s is quite unlike that of a young woman in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Young women today are apparently far more adventurous. They start having sex at a younger age and have many more premarital partners than any previous generation. Fillion notes that, by a number of measures, young women today act more like men of any age than like their mothers and older sisters. She cites findings of the United States National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS) published in 1994, based on face-to-face interview responses of approximately 3500 men and women aged 18 to 55, that identified an enormous generation gap in women's sexual behavior. Relatively speaking, the conduct of men in this area has changed only modestly over time. For

women, however, the story is very different. The youngest women in the study, those born between 1963 and 1974, were almost twice as likely as women born just 10 years earlier and 6 times as likely as those born 30 years earlier to have had multiple sex partners before the age of 18. By the age of 20, three-quarters of the youngest group of women in the study had had multiple sex partners; one-third had had four or more. In short, most 20-year-olds have already had at least as many sexual partners as their mothers had had at 50 years of age. Although this is an American study, the age cohorts in the NHSLS are the same as the mothers and daughters in this study of mothering and clearly, the findings are relevant to the women interviewed.

Theme Seven: Protecting in a Harsh Reality

Protecting their daughters was another theme that was mentioned in each mother's interview. It arose out of Blythe's experience of wanting to provide protection for Sara from physical and sexual violence. One of the examples she cited follows:

> And I remember one of the worst things that happened was in our neighborhood which was a decent neighborhood. . . . one of her little classmates was found murdered. I was so frightened by that because it happened right on our street—the little girl had been taken right from the park, the very park that Sara played in, after school when I wasn't even home. I mean Sara was older, but still a kid, and I thought, I can't protect her!

Catherine also felt a need to protect her daughters from physical and sexual assault, not by strangers, but from within her family. Protection also involved talking to them openly about her own harsh experiences as a young woman.

> Catherine: The oldest daughter knows about my [back street] abortion because she had an abortion herself. And she knew about my abortion before that. I always wanted them both to know everything so that if it ever happened to them it would be their choice. If they knew that these things could happen to me, they would know it would be okay to come to me. I didn't want them to have that fear of being totally out there alone. That was my form of protecting them.

For Beth and also for Blythe there was an awareness of a need to protect against the economic struggle that comes with low-paying employment.

> Beth: When I saw these payments on her bill, it scared me. Like how is she making $300 payments? So I asked her how. She cried. Once we slowed everything down and took a look at all the complexities of the situation, we sorted out a lot. It was a serious discussion, had a lot of layers to it but the biggest impact was that we connected despite the intensity of emotion. Now that she's on her own, in her own place and coping with a low paying job, I find that I'm in there every month "helping." It's such a tough balance—making room for her to learn from her experience and supporting her through it.

For Jane, "protecting" involved providing exactly the right food and nutrition, for her daughters, especially her youngest, who had extreme food allergies.

Jane: As babies, the girls were not extremely healthy, both had allergies, the youngest more than the oldest, very severe for the youngest. This limited what we could do because we had to be close to a kitchen and proper ingredients to feed them correctly. I would take them to McDonald's, but not to eat, to play. We would bring our own food. . . . Now the older one is having some physical problems and I find myself absorbed in trying to solve that problem in the same way that I had with the other one. Oh, they are such a worry. You just want them to be healthy and well and when they aren't healthy and well, well I would cut off my right arm for them.

For Nikohl, protecting meant defending her kids against abusive authority figures, the police, and the bad name that adolescents have, but "do not deserve."

Nikohl: The police in Victoria harass them. They stop them on the streets, they search them, they do stuff they're not even supposed to do because they don't consider teenagers to be human. I got so upset with the police in August. It's against human rights what they do to teenagers. Adolescence has a bad name—

There was another type of protection that was important to Nikohl.

Nikohl: About three years ago I was very, very ill also, and I really thought that was going to be it then, so that period of time was hard for them. I was very ill, I

was not sure I would make it out of that. I really thought that was it. So that was hard and I think from that period we have gone through a joy of living—that was really unique because we went so low. But now we're back into the normal stuff. We forgot that awhile back now. So now we're back into—I'm a totally normal woman in that I'm not diseased, I'm not handicapped, I'm not. I am healthy and normal. So when people refer to me as being sick or diseased, they look at them like saying they really don't know you. And it's true, they don't. Because I'm not sick, I'm not diseased. I'm not! I have an electrical problem. So I like that. I like that they see me whole and not sick.

I had a sense that protection for Nikohl also involved strongly hoping for her own recovery from ALS, and a minimizing of the reality that she was dying, perhaps for herself as much as for her daughters' sake.

Mothering and protecting one's children seem like closely related topics. It is clear that each of these mothers worried about their daughters' physical safety and well-being. Some of these women also expressed the worry that their own mothers had had for them as children and adolescents. According to Pipher (1994) mothers do have reason to worry about their daughters' well-beings as girls today are at an increased risk. "They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior high means using chemicals and being sexual. As they navigate a more dangerous world, girls are less protected" (p.

12). She also believes that parents in our North American culture at this time in history experience "unprecedented" stress in their parenting roles as a result.

In Canada, the statistics about violence against women are very disturbing. According to Statistics Canada's Survey (1993), 51% of Canadian women, since their 16th birthday, have endured at least one episode of male violence. In British Columbia, it is 59%, the highest in the country. Almost two-thirds of the women who experienced violence were assaulted by men known to them. Violence as a backlash against feminism has also been documented. For example, when the 14 young women, accused of being feminists, were murdered by a man at the Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal on December 6, 1989, it shocked the entire country. Testament to this is seen in the continuing, annual, memorials and vigils held across the country to remember these women and to remind us of the need that remains to successfully address the issue of violence against women. Physical and sexual violence against women is a reality in our society. Girls and women are vulnerable to violence. This concern is expressed clearly in the voices of the mothers in this study.

Theme Eight: Single Parenting and Dating

Although it was not a planned part of this study, it turned out that all of the women who participated in the interviews had separated or divorced from their daughters' fathers. This theme originated from Blythe's transcript. She, Nikohl, and Beth talk about their experiences of dating and their relationships with their daughters.

Both Blythe and Nikohl decided to remain single parents. For Blythe, this was a very conscious decision to not introduce "a stepfather or predominant male" in the household she shared with her daughter.

> Blythe: She hated me to have boyfriends. She hated that the most. Probably it wouldn't fizz on her now, but when she was 13 that's when it was the worst. . . . [In] all the years that Sara and I lived together I didn't live with a man. I had boyfriends, but at that time I didn't want to live with anyone because I didn't think it was fair to Sara. I though it was just fairer if we lived together, then I wouldn't have to work out all this other stuff with a stepfather or predominant male in the house.

Nikohl's attitude around dating and sex seemed quite casual. She seemed to communicate easily with her daughters and sons on these subjects.

> Nikohl: [Talking about sex] was so part of my life as a single mother. You know it's like I talked with them about my boyfriend—how it felt if we were good lovers. They were in relationships that lasted longer than mine. Allison turned 18 and she just celebrated her three-year anniversary . . . I've not been [in a relationship] since 1981. I've had 3 years, my max., and Jennifer, she had three relationships a piece, two years minimum. So when it came to sex, they brought their lovers home and they still do. And if I did have one, I did too. So that was not a big issue.

Beth's experience was not as casual. After divorce ended her 20-year marriage, Beth spent some time on her own, then welcomed her new relationship with John.

> Beth: It was a year or so before John came on the scene. And although I was at school and studying, I tried to be really mindful of how it would be for them. John started spending more time here. But she was quite responsive to him. I was more or less on my own for about a year, then he was here more and eventually started spending the night. Amber struggled with this and even wanted to be notified when he planned to stay over—like with a note on the door that said he would be staying over.

Acknowledging the sexuality of their mothers is uncomfortable for many daughters (and sons). This was not so much of a problem for Nikohl, but for Blythe and for Beth, dating and becoming sexual in their relationships with men after their divorces was very awkward for their daughters. For Beth, this issue also led to feelings of guilt.

> Beth: [I]t really brought to my mind that I was busy thinking about myself and my new relationship when in fact it, in quotation marks, should have been her time. . . . the focus should have been on her—that it was her sexuality that should have been getting the attention, but for me, it was mine.

Theme Nine: Taking on the Role

"Taking on the Role" is a theme that came from Catherine's story.

> Catherine: I didn't get to breastfeed my children . . . because the doctor said. . . . And no one did. And my mother hadn't. I didn't want to do it because no one else was, and my structure was that I did what everyone else did. . . . I carried Dr. Spock in my back pocket. The bloody book didn't say anything! . . . Spock would say, "Go to the doctor," "Just go see your doctor". . . . [And I went] all the time. I had no natural instinct. . . . I did not trust it. . . . the role models I had were from the TV. They all said the same things. . . . My mother would always tell me, you know, "You always make yourself available for your man," "Never say no," stuff like that, and I believed my mother. That was the only thing I had to believe in.

For Catherine, mothering largely involved following a societal prescription for the role of wife and mother. This formulation had its costs. Catherine is still recognizing some of the shortcomings of having lived this way.

> Catherine: I can tell you just in the last couple of weeks . . . my daughter . . . quite a feminist . . . is talking about [things] that are resonating definitely, from my upbringing, but they are bringing up anger in there. So I think I need to sit down and deal with it, what is coming up now, because there is a part of me that says, "Did we let ourselves down? How come we didn't know?" because I knew a lot.

Beth's description of her process of awareness, of how she was brought up and how she parented, resonates with Catherine's experience.

> Beth: Focusing on the children, being there for them both physically and emotionally, was a firm commitment. My mother martyred herself, gave up her needs for us kids. She suffered and despaired about whether we acted in ways that met the neighbors' approval. I wanted my children to speak from the heart and stand up for their ideas. I encouraged them to be themselves, but I think deep down I struggled with my own inner conflict and edited myself. As I gain more awareness and increasingly recognize my truth, I express myself more authentically, but I'm still aware of the struggle. I still feel myself battling. Is it really okay to be who you are? I still find myself weighing it out.

Nikohl's comments on this topic also stand out. She was the least pressured of this group of women by the societal prescriptions for mothering:

> Nikohl: Virginia Satir is good. She helped me a lot. And reading her helped me be strong before I was and to let me be the kind of mother I'd like to be and not let me be influenced by everybody else. . . . My value is not on conforming, my value is on originality, therefore with them to be non-conformists is a plus for me. It's a value.

Taking on the role of "good mother" was an internalized, personal process for these women. They came to it by reassessing the mothering they received from their own mothers, then formulating what they would ideally do differently in their roles as mothers. This wasn't easy. There is a sense of conflict or struggle in many of stories with

trying to be an "ideal" mother, and at the same time, living with authenticity. The mothers relied on expert advice (i.e., Dr. Spock, Virginia Satir) and were aware, at some level, of the societal prescriptions and responsibilities that came with mothering.

Bepko and Krestan (1990) believe a woman sets herself up in an impossible bind when she takes on the role of "Good Mother."

> Almost certainly if it has been important to you to be a good daughter, it will be even more important to you to be a good mother. You may think of your child as a visible symbol of your own goodness—having a child at all may confirm your compliance with the rule that women focus on someone other than themselves. If your own parents did fail to meet some of your developmental needs, you'll want to be sure you don't do the same. You'll want to give your child everything you lacked. And maybe you'll even hope to reclaim some part of your own lost self in your child.
>
> Since you know it's your job to make relationships work, and since a mother's relationship with her child is viewed as the major influence on a child's development, you'll think of yourself as entirely responsible for your child's health and happiness. Since you know it's your role to nurture, you will expect yourself to do it perfectly. There will be a lot riding on the happiness and success of this child—in effect he or she will represent your own success or failure at being a good mother and thus a good woman. (pp. 188-189)

Theme Ten: Realizing the Responsibility

"Realizing the responsibility" was a strong realization for Catherine, from whom this theme stems. She perceived that her mother had modeled a style of "over-responsible" mothering that she also took on. Subsequently, Catherine has learned that giving up responsibility and control is healthier for herself and her daughters.

> Catherine: [B]earing a child . . . I found that the most overwhelming experience, to think that I was to be responsible for this child. It was truly overwhelming. My blood pressure was out of control and they couldn't get it back under control and nobody could understand, because it was such an experience for me to have a baby. . . . I had no idea. And yet I did at some level. But I had no idea how much I would take that responsibility on.

Jane also talked about her sense of responsibility in her mothering. She and Blythe both alluded to the fears attached to having power over the lives of their daughters.

> Jane: Motherhood gave me a sense of "power" for lack of a better word. I was now responsible for these young creatures and wanted them to grow up to be contributing members of our society. The underlying thinking was that people who contribute seem to be fulfilled, happy, and generally successful in personal and financial aspects of life. The "power" part was my ability to shape their environment of learning. . . . My opinion of her counts probably more than I realize. That's scary, that my opinion should count so much because that is a lot

of power. That's frightening. A person can make a mistake, that's a huge responsibility.

Blythe: I questioned my moves and wondered if I was doing the right thing and how this would impact on Sara later. I recognized that what I gave her and the kind of environment she grew up in would result in the kind of adult she was going to be.

These women recognized the responsibility they had as mothers and took it very seriously. Feeling that they had significant influence on the lives and futures of their daughters felt "overwhelming" and "frightening" at times. I had a sense that these women felt quite alone with this burden of responsibility. Other than Nikohl, who sought early help and support through counselling, each of the other women seemed to have limited support with the heavy responsibilities that they took on. For Catherine and Jane this lack of support occurred in their marriages, perhaps indicating an unequal distribution in parental responsibility at that time.

For the women in this study, the responsibility of mothering extends beyond caring for their children. As their parents get older, women often take on the responsibility for their care. In 1994 a Statistics Canada Study shows that twice as many women as men were both working full-time and caring for an elderly relative. It is estimated that given the current demographic trends in Canada, over the next decade, the numbers of women "sandwiched" between the needs of adolescents, aging parents and

demanding careers will continue to increase, adding complexity to the roles and responsibilities they have already (Foot, 1996). For Jane, Blythe, Beth, and Catherine this has been the case. Each of these women acknowledged the importance of their current relationships with living parents. They spoke not only of feeling increased responsibility for their care, but of also valuing these relationships more.

Theme Eleven: Redefining One's Self

"Redefining one's self" captured an idea that most of the mothers discussed. The theme stems from the following segment in Catherine's account:

> Catherine: Now there is another stage for me as a mother, to truly be able to become my own being and not just be mother. . . . I do a lot of work, a lot of personal growth work, but I find when you get back into that family unit it's like you haven't done any work, sometimes. So the journey is far from over.

After having taken on the role of mother, as Catherine did so consciously, finding and redefining herself has involved personal growth. She has recognized the difficulty in attempting to shed her old role—a process that has required a truthful acknowledgment of her own patterns of behavior, such as cooking the Christmas turkey year after year, and a confrontion with and reminder to her daughters when they draw her back in to mediate their conflicts.

Beth also struggles in her self-redefinition, with "living more authentically" both as a parent and as a woman. Her process seemed to resonate with that of Catherine's.

Beth: I wanted my children to speak from the heart and stand up for their ideas. I encouraged them to be themselves, but I think deep down I struggled with my own inner conflict and edited myself. As I gain more awareness and increasingly recognize my truth, I express myself more authentically, but I'm still aware of the struggle. I still feel myself battling. Is it really okay to be who you are? I still find myself weighing it out.

Although Jane did not talk about this theme specifically, her decision to pursue a career after having been a "very involved" mother for over 10 years speaks of a redefinition in itself. Blythe discussed a re-evaluation of some of her own values and beliefs based on her daughter's persistent questions and insights.

Blythe: I said, "I just don't think you can marry for money and be happy," but that's what I always believed and I don't really know if that's true. It seems to me that a lot of people do and they seem to do okay. So I start to wonder if what I just said was right.

Nikohl describes how she expected the loss of her day-to-day connections with her daughters would feel and projected forward as to how she would have to redefine herself in order to replace this connection.

Nikohl: So you have part of my social part of me that's leaving—part of who I am, which is the mother of those 2 daughters—they're gone. So part of me's gone. Now I know that and need to get ready for that time. I'm dreading it. I already

> have fears. I know I'll live and I'll be fine. I'll find myself. I'm not looking forward to it. . . . I know I have to come up with new dreams for me. I'll identify myself differently and I know I will keep myself busy. I'm not worried about that. I think it's the emotions. I have a lot of nurturing coming through my children and that won't be there and I'll have to look for that. I'll have to replace it. . . . So I guess my friends, my needed friends, I kept in touch with but now I'll have to keep in touch even more because I'll have them more than I'll have my kids. So that mirror that's coming, I'm not looking forward. They're leaving therefore part of me is leaving. I have to look at a new identity.

As these women described their own processes of redefining themselves, in and outside their roles as mothers, they often linked this to their own mothers, seeing them differently, perhaps in a broader context. Catherine, Jane and Nikohl regard their mothers when they speak of their own redefinitions.

> Catherine: There's a sadness too for my mom. I mean I had a lot, but poor old Mom, she had a life of hell. That's where I have some issues around how we blame the mothers all the time. There's all this, "Well, I'm like this because my mother did such and such." I now have a better understanding for Mom and maybe that's the way it's supposed to be, maybe there's a reason for all that, that we just don't understand yet. Maybe it is a part of role modeling too. You know, they never saw me appreciate my mom and maybe that is a part of it.

Jane: I think I tried to do the best that I could with the awareness that I had at the time and I'm sure my parents did the same.

Nikohl: I am reclaiming it for my ancestors and from my grandmothers and from my mother who did the best she could. I'm not happy with her mothering but she did the best she could.

In accordance with the study in which daughters in their 30s exonerated their mothers for not discussing sex (see Theme Six), the mothers in this study also expressed compassion toward their own mothers. As these women look back at the experience of having mothered their own adolescent daughters, they seem better able to empathize with their own mothers, exonerating and forgiving them for not having met all of their childhood and adolescent needs. Catherine's comment of role-modelling is important. I believe that my own appreciation for my mother may have been present prior to my adolescence as a result of seeing her value the relationship with her mother—my maternal grandmother—who was separated from us by a communist border.

Theme Twelve: Adjusting to Separation and Divorce

This theme stemmed primarily from Beth's storied account of her mothering experiences.

Beth: So when Amber was 13 the marriage was dissolving. And it wasn't really talked about very freely. I mean it was a little bit, from an abstract place. You

know we acknowledged that it was happening, but in a pretty abstract way, like, "It isn't about you, it's about Dad and I." But I was pretty vague about what was going on because I didn't want to leave her with a negative impression of her dad. So I was really conscious of her. I kind of wanted to protect her. I got really confused about how to do it well and I went to counselling and tried to find out how best to be there for her. It was solid support. The more I could talk it out, the better it was for me. And Amber.

The other women also described adjusting to their own separation or divorce processes because as mentioned earlier, in relation to Theme Eight, all of the women who participated in this study had separated or divorced from their daughters' fathers. When Jane separated from her husband, her daughters were 13 and 15; Nikohl's daughters were 6 and 8; and Blythe never lived with Sara's father. Catherine separated from her husband when her girls were 18 and 20, and Beth's daughter was 13 years old.

Nikohl: I had divorced already by that time [when Jennifer was 8] and she was against it. . . . It took her about two years . . . to understand that our two personalities, it would be better if we were not together. It took her a good two years . . . and she was not very happy because Jennifer likes schedules and routine and her structure had changed and therefore she reacted really, really hard to the separation and divorce. So I focused a lot of energy on her for about two years

indirectly because I went through counselling, so she [the counsellor] helped me deal with her.

Blythe: [In] all the years that Sara and I lived together I didn't live with a man. I had boyfriends, but at that time I didn't want to live with anyone because I didn't think it was fair to Sara. I though it was just fairer if we lived together, then I wouldn't have to work out all this other stuff with a stepfather or predominant male in the house.

Catherine: And when my marriage broke, I cried. Oh my God, I thought this was it, I was going to starve to death. What was I going to do? Now, this is a woman who has always had good employment, good jobs, and was capable of being whatever she chose to be. And I was petrified and finally I thought, I just can't sit here, I'd better do something about it. And my life has been wonderful.

Jane: When the girls were reaching adolescence, it was clear that my marriage wasn't working. I realized that I needed additional training if I was going to survive without it.

The process of separation/divorce can be difficult for children. Beth, Nikohl, Blythe and Jane were conscious of the distress in their daughters, who were all quite young (adolescent or younger), at the time of separation. These women found divorce and separation challenging both for themselves and their daughters and the adjustment process took time.

As the divorce rate in Canada continues to increase, many couples are deciding to have children outside of marriage. "[M]any Canadians are abandoning the concept of marriage as a prerequisite for having children; almost one in three new babies in Canada today is born to unmarried parents" (Foot, 1996, p. 187). As well, the more recent incidence of single women deciding to parent on their own from the outset is also more common. Despite this trend, the stigma attached to being a single parent, especially a single mother holds fast. Given that the societal prescriptions consider two-parent family systems the ideal, any departure from this form is seen as inherently "risky" for promoting child development (Febbraro, 1994; Penfold & Walker, 1983).

Describing the unspoken hierarchy of mothers in patriarchal culture, Levine and Estable (1981) recognize that only two groups of mothers escape criticism—mothers in a two-parent nuclear family (not on public assistance) and mothers who have been widowed. Worell (1988) relates this particular hierarchy of mothers to societal perceptions of women's immorality and sex-role violations, for example, in regard to norms against sexual contact before marriage (the never-married mother); following divorce (the single mother with an ex-partner); or with a member of her own gender (the lesbian mother). As Worell observes, for all three groups of single mothers, the commitment to traditional marriage is violated; only widows escape the deviant label.

Catherine discusses the fears she had facing her separation from her husband and now she observes her own daughter dealing with feelings of anger and confusion as she faces the prospect of being a single mother.

> My daughter is now trying to live in a way that is more true as much as possible and with the granddaughter, but it's funny, she's now in a place where she is taking on the shame and the guilt of not having a man in the house for her daughter. . . .Yet she knows how her father was, how verbally abusive he was. They love their father very much but she saw that. She knows what she is capable of, she doesn't know she is the same as I was, but this thing is so big . . . this is still going on. . . .You see the shows on TV, she goes to kindergym at the Y. The fathers are there . . . she is there on her own with her daughter. If fathers care, she gets all melodramatic about it and upset about it. When does that cycle stop?

Negotiating through the process of separation and divorce and adjusting to single parenthood is not easy in our culture that still values the traditional, heterosexual family. Single mothers often face significant reductions in family income and less involvement in parenting by their ex-husbands, thereby increasing the mothers' responsibilities for the well-being of their children. After adjusting to separation and single parenthood, a number of the women interviewed articulated advantages and positive outcomes. Nikohl felt that parenting on her own motivated her to look more carefully at her style of parenting, and to take on more responsibility for her children's happiness. Decisions were made with her

children, knowing that she didn't need to negotiate them with her ex-husband. Catherine described a new found freedom that has allowed her to live more fully and to model this style of "being" for her daughters.

Theme Thirteen: Feeling Guilty

All the mothers in this study spoke about feelings of guilt and I was quick to identify it as such. During a meeting with my advisor, Dr. Jean Clandinin, I realized that during my conversations with the individual mothers I was very careful not to lead the discussion with theoretical constructs such as conflict, separation, and individuation. However, I recognized guilt and named it for women when they did not. The theme did originate, however, in Beth's own words and she did identify "Feeling Guilty" as a "theme."

> Beth: I think one of the most powerful and difficult themes—I'm not sure if it is a direct feeling—is to feel or not feel super guilty that she had to go through that [my divorce] at her age, just starting high school. She is such a really neat person, with so much on the ball, and she started to have trouble in school. She was a brilliant student, really bright, creative, inquisitive mind, and always had been. And I took it on, I thought it was my fault. And of course her dad thought so too. He was helping me to feel that way and I think it is thematic. When something is troublesome and I'm anywhere near it, then somehow it's my fault.

Each of the other women also discussed the situations that led them to experience feeling guilty. Blythe talked about feeling "divided" as a single working mother, not being home when her daughter came home from school; naming her daughter a "latchkey kid." Jane described how she still feels she is making up for the time when she was away pursuing further education during their adolescence.

> Blythe: I really wanted to be a good mom to her, as good as I could be and to feel so divided because you had to go to work and all the things you had to do, and a lot of times I just didn't have enough time. . . . she had to let herself into the house a lot of times after school when she got older. She was a latchkey kid.
>
> Jane: They resented me going quite a bit and so they pulled back from me. I always felt that I was catching up. I always felt that I was making up for something.

Nikohl remembers how she felt when she realized she did not "like" her daughter's personality characteristics. And Catherine discussed feeling "guilty" for having become over-responsible for her daughters' stresses and problems, thereby shaping them into who she wanted them to be.

> Nikohl: When I separated from their dad . . . her reaction was different than with the others. . . . I realized that I could dislike one of my child's personality traits. That didn't happen before and I was afraid, I was worried about me and being a mother. What kind of mother would not like some of her children's personality

traits? So that way I became, it kind of woke up those voices. . . . Jennifer started to be self-destructive. . . . It was just nerves. And the more nervous she was of the problems that were not of her own doing, the more she did it [pulled at her eyelashes] and she would do it all the time. It scared me a lot. . . . But then, it was, I felt, my job to protect her from that kind of stress.

Catherine: Now, who they are, they haven't a bloody clue and they are starting to work on it now because of us being so responsible, because we made them into what we wanted to be, I believe. They are not—well, they are people now. They are starting to be who they want to be, which is quite wonderful. And I'll be glad when they get there. But that's what we did to them, so there is a lot of stuff that has been done. But it wasn't done—if I had to do this all over again, it would sure be, it would sure be different now, if I had all this knowledge then.

Given the historic and current cultural expectations of mothers, guilt is a common emotional experience for many mothers. Adrienne Rich (1976), who raised her own children in the 1950s and early 1960s, wrote of "the invisible violence of the institution of motherhood" to mothers: "the guilt, the powerless responsibility for human lives, the judgments and condemnations, the fear of her own power, the guilt, the guilt, the guilt" (p. 282).

Understanding the Narrative Themes

In reviewing the narrative themes, I recognize that this research has implications for my own experiences as a mother and as a daughter and that this reflects in my counselling practice. The primary themes which resonated for me personally were: "Being Prepared for the World," "Protecting in a Harsh Reality," "Mothering Differently," Taking on the Role," and "Redefining One's Self." These themes describe a narrative of mothering, one that, in part, reflects my own process.

The themes of "Being Prepared for the World," and "Protecting in a Harsh Reality" evolve out of painful adolescent experiences in each of our stories. The feeling of being unprepared and of experiencing violence and the threat of violence were also common experiences among us.

Deciding from these experiences to mother differently was also a consistent reaction. Each woman made the decision to do something differently, something specific that they felt their own mothers had missed with them. This plan to mother differently often incorporated taking on the "ideal" mother role. Probably this has occurred for all of us in varying degrees.

For most of the women in this study "Taking on the Role" meant accepting the full responsibilities of mothering. Many felt conflict and guilt for not being able to live up to the standard, especially as they dealt with their transition through separation and divorce. Considering that the definition for "ideal" parenting occurs in a stable two-

parent, heterosexual relationship, most of these women felt some conflict in their status as single mothers. Adjusting to separation and having social and sexual relationships after the separation or divorces were also challenges.

"Redefining one's self" as a woman, separate from being a wife and a mother, was also a process that each of the women described. Their own re-thinking of their roles also extended to their own mothers' roles. Where earlier some of these women expressed anger and blamed their mothers for their lack of protection or preparedness, later in their lives while themselves mothering, they seemed able to exonerate their mothers. Recognition and appreciation of the context of their mothers' lives seemed to increase the level of understanding and empathy that these women were able to have for their mothers.

Chapter VI: Conclusions

Summary

This study begins with a brief outline of some of the historical and cultural changes that have affected women's lives and the experiences of mothering in North American culture over the past century. Though women's lives have changed significantly from one generation to the next, psychological literature on mothering has paid little attention to this sociohistorical context. The current ideology of "good" mothering is a collection of prescriptions that largely took form in post-war North America, when the relatively new field of psychology provided "scientific" evidence of the direct impact mothering had on childhood adjustment and development.

The primacy of the early mother-child relationship, as initially postulated by psychoanalytic theory has held considerable authority. Despite criticism and evidence to the contrary, the theory and its implications have filtered down to a lay perspective. Women, as mothers, have internalized the heavy responsibility of mothering, blaming themselves for any shortcomings in their children. Though mothers have been implicated in much psychological literature (often in a blaming nature), their first-hand, lived experiences including the contexts, realities, and limitations of their lives as mothers have rarely been considered.

Mother-daughter research has developed primarily from a psychoanalytic perspective, through object-relations and self-in-relation theories. These theories focus on the different developmental processes of girls and boys in relation to their mothers. The task of adolescence, according to psychoanalytic and developmental theories, is to separate from the mother. The separation/individuation theory has been challenged by self-in relation theorists, whose research studies involving adolescent girls have begun to describe a different process, one of differentiation while maintaining connection. Women's experiences of mother/adolescent daughter relationships have not been studied widely especially outside the parameters of psychoanalytic theory.

Given the very limited contribution from women themselves on the experiences of mothering their adolescent daughters, this study responded to the need to return to mother's actual lived experiences. Recognizing the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship as it exists in our patriarchal society, taking into account the sociohistorical context of individual mother-daughter pairs, and actually listening to women's accounts of their mothering experiences seemed essential to understanding mother-daughter relationship dynamics. Instead of the mechanistic and organismic natural science methods that have not acknowledged, valued, or validated women's experiences of mothering, this human science approach provides a basis for studying the experiences of mothers from a new and respectful perspective.

The five women, mothers of late-adolescent daughters (between the ages of 18 and 26), who participated in unstructured, open-ended interview/conversations, each gave rich and descriptive accounts of their experiences of mothering. These were often told in the context and history of their own childhood and adolescent experiences. Two to three main predominant themes were drawn from each woman's overall account of mothering.The women agreed that the predominant themes were very significant in their lives and that they often carried over from their relationships with their own mothers.

The women in this study, Jane, Blythe, Nikohl, Beth and Catherine talked about many issues that are relevant to women's experiences of mothering daughters. Given that they had all decided to separate or divoce, these experiences and consequences also resonate with a broader population. It is, however, not my intent to generalize to all mothers. No two mothers are alike. I think that living in a patriarchal society at this time and place creates a general contextual background that is similar for women, but that women also bring many specific variations to their own experience. The individual women's stories exemplify this variation.

Jane's story involved taking on the responsibility for giving her daughters strong feelings of self-worth and for better preparing them for the world. She struggled with these issues herself and confronted her own fears by going back to school when her daughters were adolescent. She still feels some guilt for having left them to pursue her own further education, but in actuality has probably provided them with the strong role-

modelling to do exactly what she had hoped—to take care of themselves from a feeling of worth.

In many ways Nikohl was least pressured by societal prescriptions for mothering. Diagnosed with a terminal illness while she was raising four children challenged her to live and to mother very consciously. Her clarity, integrity and honesty, allowed her to stand behind her children, to defend and support them, and to give them vital skills for living. She expressed deep feelings of loss, in knowing that they all planned to leave home in the near future, and no doubt, in facing her death.

Blythe's story involves single parenting at a young age after an unplanned pregnancy. As a result she described her experience as one of growing up along with her daughter. She struggled with financial pressures, with limited external support, with having to choose between working, spending time with her daughter and taking time for herself. Blythe showed strong commitment to and respect for her daughter by deciding not to introduce a significant male figure into their lives, and by educating her early around issues of sexuality and of danger, trying to spare her from "learning the hard way."

Following societal prescriptions for being a "good mother," Catherine's story involves trying to live up to the role. She took her responsibility very seriously and after years of trying to fit her daughters and herself into the mold, she came to regret the control and over-responsibility that she had taken on and made the decision to change her

way of being. Separating herself from the role and redefining herself as a woman and a different kind of mother she has found new freedom.

Beth's story involves the recognition of wanting to "live her life before she died." Serious illness and an unhappy marriage brought her to confront and to take action to change her life at the same time as her daughter's adolescence. Beth struggled with the guilt of taking care of her own needs when she sensed that her daughter was a vulnerable age.

Limitations of this Study

Following the contextual world view that guided this study, it is essential to consider the specifics of the research results. Assuming that these findings reflect the experience of all women who are mothers is both contrary to the underlying philosophy and an erroneous assumption. No two mothers are alike. The results of this study begin to show some of the variation within women's experiences of mothering, despite some shared demographic similarities: Caucasian, middle-class, age (between 40 and 50 years old), education, employment outside the home, and separation or divorce from their daughters' fathers. The rich descriptions of the specifics of their lives allowed for a much deeper understanding of each woman's relationship with her adolescent daughter in her unique sociocultural context.

The women in this study were not in closely bonded relationships with the fathers of their daughters. Their experiences of mothering involved heavy parenting

responsibility. It is argued that due to early psychological formulations, primary parenting responsibility has been unfairly placed on mothers, who are also frequently blamed for developmental and behavioral outcomes. Where fathers share equally in the responsibilities of parenting, and where parents have similar values and parenting styles, the experience of mothering would, no doubt, be very different.

The issue of support is another factor that would significantly change the experience for mothers. Literature and research done on mother-daughter relationships in other cultures frequently contrast the experience of white middle-class girls and women in North American culture, which is often used as the standard. Joseph and Lewis (1981), for example, describe differences in ways black mothers and their daughters relate and conceptualize their relationships. They report that daughters have a very positive sense of respect for their mothers because of their familiarity with the circumstances within which their mothers exist and raise their children and an empathy that comes from understanding the situation. Racism has deeply affected the experience of men and women who are not part of the dominant white culture of North America, but close support networks buffer some of the negative effects. In many cultures, the extended family (especially aunts, older siblings, cousins and grandmothers) are also involved in parenting. This practice distributes the burden of parenting and provides the support and wisdom of other family members who also care for and love their children. Unfortunately, mothering in the supportive context of other women in the family is not a common practice in mainstream Canadian culture.

> How might your life have been different, if there had been a place for you, a place of women? A place where other women, somewhat older had reached out to help you as you rooted yourself. . . . A place where there was a deep understanding of the ways of woman to nurture you in every season of your life. A place of women to help you measure your own stature . . . to help you prepare and know when you were ready. . . . to reach out . . . as younger women entered into that place . . . reach out to help them prepare as they struck root in that same timeless earth. How might your life be different? (Duerk, 1989, p.67)

Implications for Future Research

"Above all, it is the experience of motherhood—its meaning in the lives of women—rather than its usefulness or its psychopathology that should be the focus of future research" (Gerson, Alpert, & Richardson, 1990, p. 34).

Mothering is a biological and social practice that is situated in time and place, in a historic and cultural context. Psychological research, to date, has been limited by particular world views—primarily organismic and mechanistic—which have dominated how we view and study the experience. It is now important that we begin to integrate contextual explanations—the impact of race, class, sexual preference and ethnic group experiences. Multi-cultural perspectives may be of special importance in understanding the development of the mother-daughter relationship, and for helping us learn to appreciate the ways cultural and systemic power structures impact relationships.

Using human science methods in research will also provide different information to the bulk of existing literature that drew on the different philosophical framework of natural science. Narrative has proven to be a particularly powerful methodology for this study. Oral or written expressions of narrative could be used much more extensively to tell many more stories of mothering. Using narrative inquiry along with other recall enhancing forms such as: photographs, letters, or memory boxes (Connelly & Clandinin,1990) could also provide creative and exciting contexts to gather this information. Perhaps with more valid descriptions and observations of the experiences of mothers, we can again attempt to construct theories of mothering, but ones that actually speak to the experience.

Implications for Counselling

I began this study with the view that women's experiences of mothering have not been reflected in psychological theory and literature on mothering, but that these theories have deeply affected women's experiences as mothers. By focussing on the intrapsychic processes in the mother-daughter relationship, we have not considered the broader sociohistorical and political contexts of women's lives or women's experiences as mothers of daughters.

The women in this study were well aware of the societal prescriptions that held them responsible for the adjustment and development of their children, and felt guilty for not being able to live up to the ideal standards. They were aware that separation was to

be expected at adolescence and that they shouldn't interfere with this process. The women expressed beliefs that they needed to separate, to step back and to accept the separation without feeling loss and several of the mothers, themselves, drew back from their daughters. I wondered if it was confusing for them, as mothers, to, on the one hand, feel strong needs to protect and support them, yet to, on the other hand, feel that they "should" let go. Perhaps messages that warned them of the dangers of being "clinging," "over-protective," or "living through their daughters" were already instilled. Nikohl's was a unique perspective in this sense, in that she was aware of the theory but decided to mother in her own way.

Conflict, as necessary ingredient for separation, was not found. Women did not emphasize conflict in their stories. They talked about communicating, about working through difficult emotions and experiences, and about the sensitivity that it required.

The women's stories are very articulate. They described feelings and experiences that were, at times, difficult and challenging, given the limited, outside support they received. They expressed a strong commitment to mothering, caring deeply about what would happen to their daughters in the future. Clearly, they worked at giving their daughters the best tools for living that they could, given their perspective at the time. This is a positive result that should be recognized and honored when working with individuals and families.

Counsellors and therapists trained in conventional therapy models often endorse cultural stereotypes of mothers and daughters. Therapists need to be aware of the mother-blame present in many psychological theories. Their underlying assumptions and beliefs conveyed to clients, in therapy, carry strong messages, especially when they are presented from a position of authority, which is often the case in traditional therapies. Counsellors need to be very aware of the assumptions they make regarding the life situation and context of female clients, as well as their own beliefs, values and biases, and how these interact with the values of their clients. Penfold & Walker (1983) believe that professionals working with women, need to "take a new look at whether our theories about mother-infant attachment, child development, and family relatioships are valid and scientific or whether they merely reflect cultural beliefs and thus serve both to perpetuate the status quo in our society and to hide the fact that the social structures themselves may be at fault" (p. 139).

Because counsellors and therapists are frequently consulted by women about family and specific relationship issues, it is a therapist's responsibility to know about the bias against women in our culture and in our theories. Even if female clients are not feminists, awareness of the context and limitations on the lives of mothers reduces mother-blame and the burden of guilt. Counsellors need to reemphasize that other factors are also very important in influencing their lives and relationships of mothers and daughters. Some of the factors mentioned by the women in this study are: financial constraints, the relationships with the girls' fathers, their outside employment, their own

socio-cultural context including their own mothers' and parents' histories, the effects of divorce and separation, education, violence against women, and sexual violence.

Three of the mothers in this study discussed their experiences with counsellors. Beth and Nikohl appreciated the support they received. For each of them, separating their own issues from their children's issues helped them to feel less guilty and more self-assured in their parenting. Catherine's counselling left her with ambivalent feelings. Advised that she "should" leave her husband after his affair (because her daughters would lose respect for her) created a dilemna for her when she decided to stay in the marriage. Without recognizing the realities of Catherine's life—two very young children, no money and no place to go—this type of advise was not helpful to her. Women who decide to divorce and to parent alone face many obstacles and negative societal biases. Quick advice does not recognized the complexities in a woman's reality.

The strong tendency by clinicians to view psychological problems as arising out of the early mother-child relationship, with no contextual analysis is even more pronounced when the woman is a single mother. Margrit Eichler (1988) suggests that as therapists and researchers working with single mother families, we need to "inquire" about the dimensions of single mothers' lives (i.e., the socialization of their children, their residential circumstances, their emotional and economic resources, their sexuality), rather

than to "assume"one knows something about this form of family simply because it is led by a single mother.

The relationship between mothers and daughters can be strengthened by counsellors working with them. Increasing empathy, understanding and respect for one another can be achieved by helping each to understand the other, from the other's frame of reference. The women in this study appreciated telling their stories. One woman even reported that reading the full transcript of the conversations afterward, helped her to bring closure to some of her issues around mothering, that it was a therapeutic process for her. Increasing empathy for one's mother, as suggested by Howe (1988) and Caplan (1989), or for one's daughter, with suggestions from Debold, Wilson, Malave (1993) and Pipher (1994), fosters understanding and compassion. This is especially important at this time when women's lives and roles are changing so dramatically.

The importance of hearing the experiences of other mothers is also crucial for women, mothers and daughters. The isolated, unsupported experience of many mothers, particularly in the past generation, has led to self-blamed, silenced women who have not been understood. Counsellors and therapists have an inportant role in informing women of how they have been affected by "patriarchal" psychological theory in the area of mothers and daughters, and how they can restore empathy, understanding, and respect to once again promote close and supportive relationships between mothers and daughters.

Implications for Mothers and Daughters

"Many of us were mothered in ways we cannot yet even perceive; we only know that our mothers were in some incalculable way on our side"(Rich, 1976, p. 225).

To mother a child is a powerful experience—we contribute in the process but we are not omnipotent—our influence is limited. To mother an adolescent daughter in a patriarchal culture attests to these limitations. We do not have enough information on how to do this. We need to break the silence, to truthfully share our stories, then listen, really listen to other women's stories of mothering.

By recognizing the traditional psychological theories in this area, as theories, we free ourselves—free ourselves from blaming our mothers and free ourselves from taking on the blame. The experiences of the past generation(s) of mothers have, for the most part, not been represented in our literature, their perspectives have not been heard and their commitment and energy has not been valued. We can begin to change this.

For as Suzanne Danuta Walters so beautifully concluded:

> *You don't need your own natural mother to be a daughter. All you need is to feel a certain . . . careful way about people older than you are . . . A daughter is a woman that cares about where she came from and takes care of them that took care of her.* (Morrison, 1981)

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Appendix A

Consent to Participate

I, _____ voluntarily consent to participate in an interview with Rita Knodel, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand that the information given by me will be used solely for research purposes and published in the form of a thesis or otherwise. I further understand that every effort will be made to remove all identifying information. I agree to allow the interview to be tape recorded with the understanding that the tapes will be erased when the research project is complete.

Date_____

Signed_____

Witnessed_____